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January 2019
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Mish Barber-Way with June Pet of the Month Scarlett Sage

FROM THE EDITOR

DO you all feel *different* yet? I do. But that's none of your goddamn business.

This is a fresh year for *Penthouse*. After the tumbleweed that was last year, we are all rejuvenated, resilient, and ready to go. We've grown past the bullshit, but it's never really that far behind, and it's always ready to stink up our path at a moment's notice.

When we settled on the "growth" theme for this issue, our writers naturally rose to the task: William Lee offers a how-to guide on growing your own cannabis, while Mitchell Sunderland's feature "The Magic Pill" explores the dangerous world of the hair-growth drug Propecia. We have a sit-down with country music's foul-mouthed freak, Wheeler Walker Jr., pay tribute to rising-star congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and You Let Me Down columnist Joe DeRosa debuts a twisted piece of fiction, "Wallace and His Checkerboard."

In the ladies department, we give you our January Pet of the Month, Jisel Lynn, who's basically Jasmine from Disney's *Aladdin* come to life; voluptuous Venezuelan expat Maria Antonella as our CyberCutie; and Vashti Windish of L.A. rock duo Warm Drag as our very first Muse. And to honor another first–the Penthouse-sponsored motocross driver Olga Roučková, who will race in the 2019 Dakar Rally in Peru–we shot our February Pet of the Month, Anna Lisa Wagner, speeding across California's Route 66 in a whip-fast Beamer. (Four hundred miles and 12 hours jammed in my Ford, but it was so worth it.)

Mish Barber-Way
Executive Editor
whatthefuck@penthouse.com

71
SPEED RACER
February
Pet of the Month
Anna Lisa
Wagner

22

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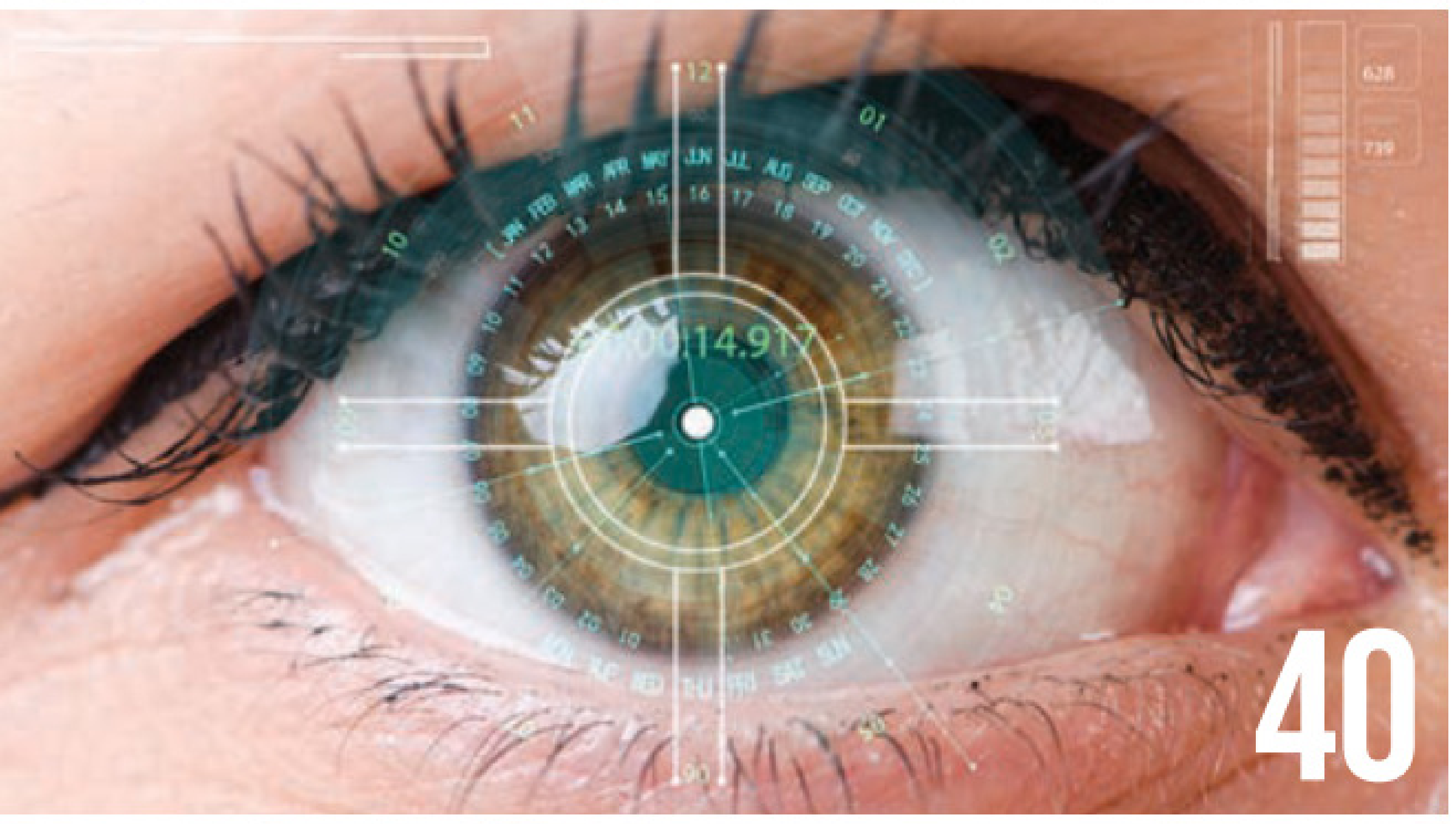
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2019

32

CONTENTS


40

8: FORUM
This month's reader exploits.

10: THE DEBRIEF
Curated news from around the world.

18: FILM
Tall actors have to find their niche.
By Paul James

20: MUSIC
It's time for music to get weird.
By Zachary Lipez

22: MAN OF THE MOMENT
Musician Mike Krol.

24: CRUSH
Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

26: GAMING
Overkill's The Walking Dead.

28: HOMEGROWN HIGH
Now's the time to grow your own cannabis.

30: WEIRD HISTORY
How a land-rush stampede created Oklahoma. By Michael Hingston

32: BUSH PILOT
Penthouse Pets from years past.

40: NEXT STOP, CYBORGS
How biohackers are reimagining humanity. By Miles Raymer

48: GAME ON
Creatures of the paint.
By Phil Hanrahan

50: INDIAN MOON
January Pet of the Month Jisel Lynn.

71: SPEED RACER
February Pet of the Month Anna Lisa Wagner.

88: THE MAGIC PILL
Is keeping a full head of hair worth the risk of erectile dysfunction?
By Mitchell Sunderland

94: VOICE OF REASON
On growing old. By Alan M. Dershowitz

96: COUNTRY MUSIC'S FILTHIEST STAR
Wheeler Walker Jr. refuses to clean up his act. Interview by William Lee

102: STOCKS AND BONDAGE
Jenny Nordbak's secret year in an L.A. dungeon.

104: CYBERCUTIE
Venezuelan beauty Maria Antonella.

116: EMBRACE THE SUCK
Can combat shape some soldiers for the better? By Matt Gallagher

120: THE MUSE
Frontwoman of Warm Drag, Vashti Windish.

130: THE HIGH LIFE
Vintage-inspired motorbikes and gadgets.

138: FICTION
"Wallace and His Checkerboard."
By Joe DeRosa

150: PARTING SHOT

50

96

104

MAIL DOMINANCE

October Woman of the Moment Molly Burch

I had never heard of Molly Burch before picking up the October issue, but now I'm in love. She is so beautiful, and her music is awesome.

—Paul P., via email

[Ed: Molly Burch is an earth angel. This year has been huge for her: a killer album, sold-out shows all over North America, and nothing but positive reviews. We back Molly 100 percent.]

I loved Miles Raymer's feature "Generation Xanax" in the November issue. Benzos are slowly creeping into our culture and no one is talking about it. I suffered an alcohol and benzo addiction for years that nearly killed me, so this feature was really impactful. Glad I bothered to look at my husband's copy of *Penthouse*!

—Sandra M., via email

[Ed: I'm so glad that feature spoke to you. And I'm even happier that your addiction is now in the past. Fuck pills. I mean, pills are amazing, that's why we can't do them. But fuck pills.]

I've been a subscriber for years, and although the content is getting better, I prefer the more explicit photos, as opposed to walking a fine line between *Penthouse* of the 70s and *Playboy*.

—C.C., via email

[Ed: We only shoot our models how they feel comfortable. And if they aren't comfortable in the pose you so desire, then tough shit! Like Guccione, I believe it's important to show every part of the woman, because every part is equally sexy. But in the end, it's up to the model.]

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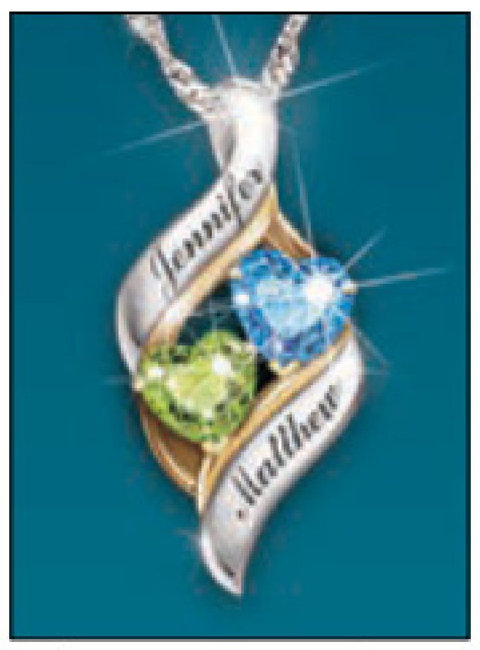

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

THE ASS RIDE

I HAD quietly admired my biking teammate, Ana, from afar for quite some time. Lagging behind our group, I'd find myself fixated on her ass and how it molded over the edges of her seat, bouncing and jiggling with every bump we hit.

After months of admiring Ana, fantasizing about burying myself inside her, we finally hooked up. One encounter led to two, then three and four. Before long, we discovered a mutual propensity for exhibitionism and assplay.

One night as we lay in bed, lazily stroking one another's backs, Ana proposed a way we might have more fun while biking with our team.

The following morning, we put our plan into action. I was so excited by the idea of Ana attending our team's practice session with a butt plug in place that my dick stood at attention the second she got an all fours and parted her cheeks.

(Our teammates knew we were dating, but no one would ever suspect that we'd bring our foreplay into a team practice. But we would know.)

Forcing myself to ignore the raging erection slapping against my thigh, I focused instead on the dark-pink puckered center of Ana's ass and prepared to prime her for the plug.

Placing a hand on either hip, I dug in my fingers until they sank into her soft flesh. I loved the round fullness of her cheeks and the way they pressed against my pelvis when I fucked her from behind.

EVERY BUMP ANA HIT MADE HER BOOTY BOUNCE ON THE BIKE SEAT, PUSHING THE BUTT PLUG EVEN DEEPER.

Feeling it was only appropriate to pay homage to something I loved so much, I brushed my lips over one cheek, then the other. Spurred on by the sigh that Ana let out, I turned my attention to her asshole. I traced the edges using the tip of my tongue, circling slowly so that I could feel the fine creases lining her skin. When she moved her ass back toward my face, I knew it was time to step things up.

Swirling my tongue over my pinky finger, I made sure the digit was good and slippery before pressing the pad against Ana's asshole. I circled the puckered skin slowly, spreading my saliva until she glistened.

Adding a bit of lube to the mix, I massaged the rim of Ana's ass until her back bowed and little mewls of pleasure fell from her lips. Once my finger could slide along Ana's skin without resistance, I worked the tip into her hole.

Like a silken Chinese finger trap, the deeper I pushed my finger, the tighter her hold on me became. Eager to help Ana relax, I placed my free hand on the base of her spine and began to gently stroke her back. With every sweep of my hand, Ana's muscles became more pliant, enabling me to slip a second finger inside her.

"Ahhh!" Ana's throaty scream echoed off her bedroom walls.

My cock pulsed in response. I wanted to hear that again.

Reaching around to Ana's front, I found her clit and began to slowly massage it.

Groaning, Ana rocked her hips against my hand. Of course, the action shifted her ass as well, and my hand followed her movements, my fingers still firmly nestled inside her. Taking advantage of the fact that I was holding Ana from both the back and the front, I steadied her hips and used a third finger to stretch her even wider.

Ana wasn't moving anywhere. Instead she relaxed against me, sighing contentedly as I continued to massage her body from the inside out.

Finally satisfied that Ana was stretched wide enough to comfortably accept the plug we'd selected, I eased my fingers from her hole.

Ana protested with a groan, but we both knew the brief feeling of loss would be worth it in the end.

I bent to pick up the plug that had rolled beneath Ana's body and cradled it in my palm. Dousing the silicone cone with lube, I rolled it around in my hand, making sure it was nice and slick. Then I placed the tip against Ana's gaping hole, circling the rim before sliding the cone inside.

With the plug comfortably seated in Ana's ass, we were ready to hit the road.

As we walked to the elevator with our bikes, I allowed myself to lag behind a bit, enjoying the way the plug forced Ana to clench her cheeks with every step. My dick twitched beneath my tight Spandex bike shorts.

Now we were both walking funny.

Fortunately for Ana, hopping on her bike erased any evidence of the silicone cone nestled inside her. Unfortunately for Ana, every bump she hit made her booty bounce on the seat, pushing the plug even deeper. Our teammates had no idea that the sweat beading on Ana's brow wasn't due to the exertion of exercise.

Around mile ten, we'd begun our cooldown when a teammate pulled up alongside Ana and asked if she was all right.

"You look a little tense," she said with concern.

Biting my tongue, I looked off to the side to hide the blush that had begun to consume my face. Fortunately we were mere blocks from the end of our ride, so close to bringing this little game to an explosive finish.

Ana gracefully thanked our friend for her concern and mumbled some lie about straining her back the night before. Careful to avoid eye contact with one another, we pedaled on.

Finally we reached the end of our ride. With only myself and Ana remaining as we sped home, I no longer tried to hide my

erection. The smooth Spandex of my bike shorts caressed the hot skin of my shaft, making me break out in a sweat.

By the time we reached Ana's front door, I was pawing at her like an animal in heat. Fuck running to the bedroom; I would bend her right over the couch that sat a few feet from her front door.

As soon as we were inside, I lifted Ana over my shoulder and made a mad dash for the couch. Glancing around, I noticed a small pair of scissors sitting on the side table. Fucking perfect.

I set Ana down in front of the couch and bent her body over it, placing her hands on the cushioned back. Shoving one of my feet between her own, I coaxed her legs apart.

Grabbing the scissors off the table, I took a moment to admire the stunning woman who loved assplay as much as I did. Her ponytail hung over her neck and face, brushing over her alabaster skin that had gone rosy-pink from anticipation and arousal.

Unwilling to invest the time and effort it would take to roll Ana's bike shorts down her perfectly sculpted thighs and ultra-trim calves, I carefully pulled the waistband away from her body and began to cut along the central seam.

The material cut easily with a satisfying *zip,* slowly peeling away to reveal Ana's bare ass. When I reached the protruding plug, I lifted the fabric away a tiny bit more, careful not to hit the plug's handle as I continued to remove her shorts.

When the Spandex hung off of Ana's legs in tattered scraps, I took a step back and drew in a breath before shucking my own bike shorts and throwing them aside.

Taking hold of the plug, I slowly twisted my wrist, allowing the ribbed cone to work its magic inside her.

Groaning, Ana shuddered. Hours of ramming the plug up her butt as she rode had left her extra sensitive, threatening to come at any second.

Giving the plug another twist, I watched with satisfaction as Ana's hips hitched in response.

Finally, I removed the plug. Ana's asshole remained wide-open—a tempting invitation to my already throbbing dick.

Realizing I needed a condom, I hastily glanced around, hoping we'd left some behind during a previous evening's adventures.

Shiny blue foil packets caught my eye on the coffee table. Thank God.

Giving my shaft a quick stroke, I tore the foil packet open with my teeth and fumbled with the latex sheath, nearly dropping the damn thing in my haste to roll it on.

But there was still one last thing I needed to do before sliding into Ana's ass.

Bending, I lowered my face to her hole and trailed my tongue around the edges. She was so open, my tongue dipped inside easily, teasing at the ultra-sensitive skin. Her strangled moans reverberated through both our bodies, making my dick pulse with need.

Feeling ready to burst, I held my breath as I finally slid into Ana. Hot and so impossibly tight, Ana's asshole closed around my shaft, drawing me deeper.

My balls grew tight and my eyes rolled back. Biting my tongue to keep the building surge of pleasure at bay, I gripped Ana's hips for support and slowly began to rock into her.

Damn, she felt good. Her ass was so fucking tight, I could barely move within her, which suited me just fine. I didn't need to move much to feel her ass walls ripple, milking my shaft so that my whole body tingled.

My breaths grew shorter and faster. Seconds from coming, I shoved my dick as deep into Ana as it could go before bringing the flat of my palm down onto her ass cheek. Hard.

I watched as her plump hips and cheeks jiggled, deliciously out of rhythm with my own movements.

Unprepared for the sudden sting on her skin, Ana's body tensed beneath me, holding my dick tighter than I ever thought possible.

This time there was no holding back my orgasm. My eyes crossed, blurring my vision as hot come jettisoned into the condom. The more I pumped into Ana, the harder I came, leaving me in what felt like an infinite loop of blinding pleasure.

Eventually, my ejections came up dry and I stilled, taking in my surroundings as my vision cleared. Though her hair was tousled and her breath short, Ana remained poised beneath me.

Mustering the last of my energy, I sank onto the couch and pulled Ana into my lap. She relaxed into me, resting her cheek on my chest. Her eyes fluttered shut and for a moment I thought she'd fallen asleep.

Just as I was about to drift off, Ana's warm breath fanned across my chest as she whispered, "Next time I think we should use a bigger plug."

—Jake W., Santa Rosa, California

CONTINUED ON PAGE 142

Seeing is believing. When you've had the encounter you've been hoping for, let us know about it! Send your letters to: *Penthouse* magazine, 8944 Mason Avenue, Chatsworth, CA 91311, or email us at letters@penthouse.com.

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THE DEBRIEF

HELTER STUPID

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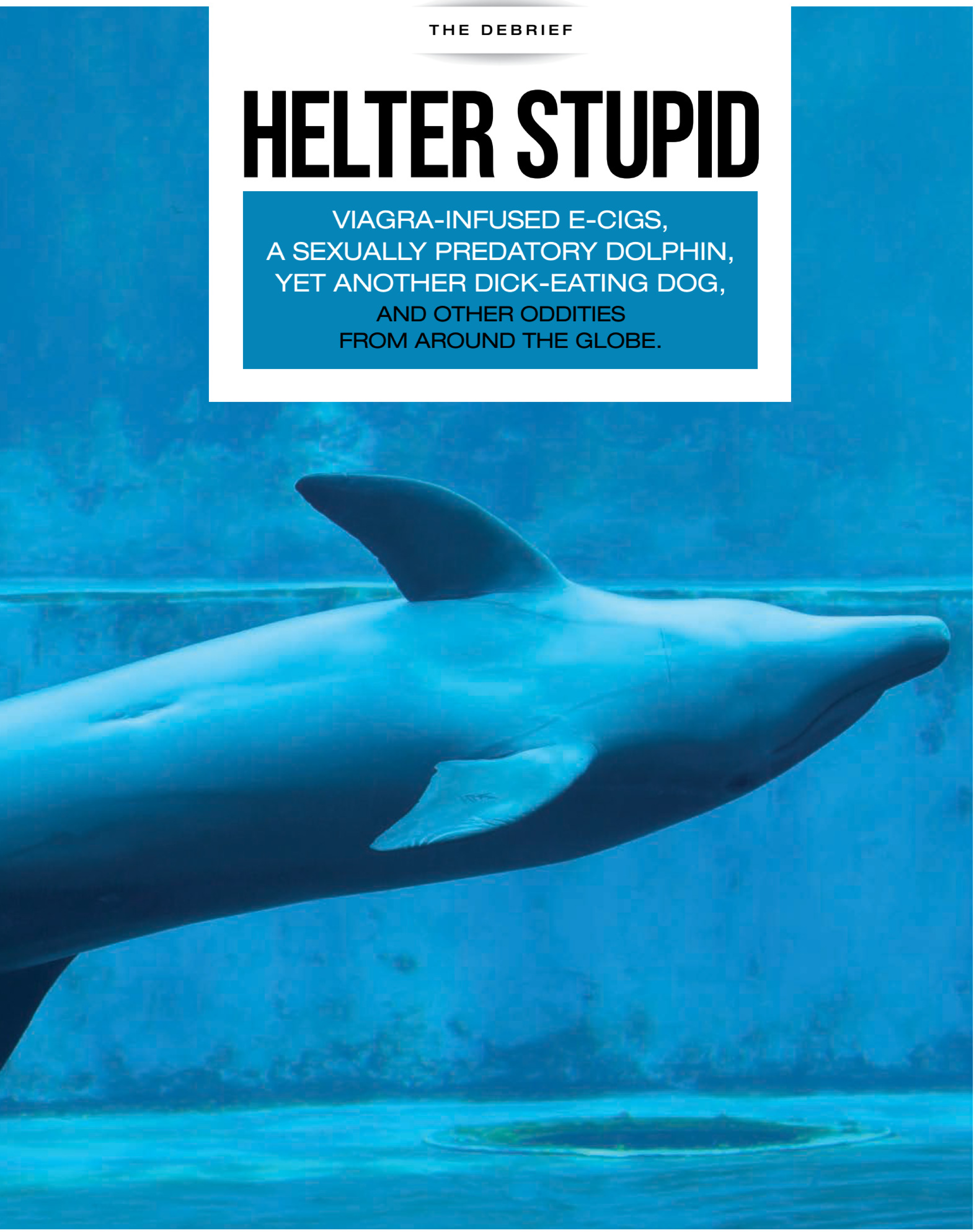

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WINTER WEENIE

WINTER is the season of death. Leaves fall, flowers die, outdoor activities cease, birds evacuate for warmer climates, and penises shrivel.

Not too long ago, there was scuttlebutt online about "winter vagina"—an alleged condition in which cold weather causes vaginas to chafe and crack due to lost moisture, ultimately requiring a dildo-sized tube of ChapStick to cure. Yet this was quickly proven to be nothing more than a misogynistic urban legend foisted upon an unsuspecting public, every last member of whom entered this world through their mother's moist, viscous, and fully lubricated vaginal canal. The truth is that vaginas stay wet 'n' wild, no matter the season.

Penises, however, aren't nearly so lucky. A condition known as "winter penis" causes shrinkage in much the same way that cold pool water causes the lil' nipper to retract up into a male's body like a frightened skink.

"Technically, winter penis is a thing," says Dr. Sarah Jarvis, clinical director of online health resource patientinfo.com. "Basically, in winter your body retains heat by shutting down blood vessels on the surface. We know that one of the most obvious places, because it has a very large surface area, is the penis. We also know that testicles tend to get smaller in cold weather and may well be drawn higher up into the scrotum."

According to Dr. Darius Paduch, director of sexual health and medicine at Weill Cornell Medicine, any air temperature lower than 60 degrees can lead to a 50 percent reduction in penile length and a diminution in girth of anywhere from 20 to 30 percent—a statistic so horrifying it should have most sane men on the planet searching for winter sublets in the "Equator" section of Craigslist.

"When you're cold, your blood vessels constrict, which limits blood flow to your penis," Paduch says. "This causes it to decrease in size."

Keep your junk warm this winter, fellas. Your full-size schween will thank you, as will your lady callers.

DOG EATS DONG II

CAN any dog truly be called "man's best friend" if it eats your junk?

Police in Scotland recently found a 22-year-old man unconscious and lying in a pool of his own blood. He was rushed to a hospital and placed into an induced coma—that is, every part of him except for his penis and scrotum, which were missing. It was impossible to reattach these organs, seeing as they were being digested by the dog who'd eaten them.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY RUTINA

The suspect, an Olde English Bulldogge named Biggie, was found "drenched in gore," according to a British tabloid. The cock-gobbling canine neither confessed to the crime nor showed any visible remorse. Since English dogs are denied the right to a trial by their peers, Biggie was presumed guilty and put to death.

The human victim, who remains unnamed—probably so people won't laugh at him the rest of his life—is predicted to live, albeit without anything that makes a man a man. Instead, he will walk through life like a Ken doll, with a smooth, flesh-colored patch where his manhood once dangled.

What is known about the case is that Biggie was not this man's dog. However, Biggie and the victim were alone in a room when the savage incident occurred.

Even more shocking—or hilarious, or, actually, both—is that investigators found the victim had "applied peanut butter, or another food spread" to his genital area before the Olde English Bulldogge eagerly chomped down and forever ripped away his manhood.

Dog lovers the world over know that peanut butter is adored by every breed, from Chihuahuas to Great Danes. For all this poor pooch knew, he was merely being invited to chow down on some peanut butter, no doubt blissfully unaware that a human penis and testicles hid behind the canine delicacy.

The moral of this story? In our human-centric world, dogs can be shamelessly tried, convicted, and put to death merely for the "crime" of loving peanut butter. Tragic!

VAPING VIAGRA

WOULD you suck on a pipe if it helped you lay pipe?

A China-based company called HelloCig Electronic Technology was issued a stiff warning by the FDA to address concerns that it was spiking its vaping liquids with boner-enhancement drugs. A lab analysis revealed that the company's "E-Cialis HelloCig E-Liquid" contained sildenafil (active ingredient in Viagra) and tadalafil (active in Cialis), while their "E-Rimonabant HelloCig E-Liquid" contained sildenafil.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY PARILOV

The FDA cited an ad that the company had posted on Twitter and Tumblr showing a partially undressed couple clasped in an erotic embrace, alongside the text, "WOOOOW, Have you tried our E-Cialis? It is amazing LOL Check out." The company also used other ads that simply showed images of Viagra and Cialis pills.

FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb was having none of this nonsense, wagging his finger at the company as if shaking a skinny, disapproving phallus:

"Vaping active drug ingredients is an ineffective route of delivery and can be dangerous. There are no e-liquids that contain prescription drugs that have been proven safe or effective through this route of administration."

(Gottlieb sounds like he'd be a real blast at parties.)

Over 200 years ago, a small ragtag group of American patriots fought off the mighty British Empire to ensure life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for its citizens. Just as our Founding Fathers didn't anticipate machine guns when they wrote the Second Amendment, they never could have foreseen erectile dysfunction drugs that you could inhale.

That said, we don't think they would have disapproved of them. To be frank, many of the Founding Fathers looked like they may have suffered from erectile issues—John Adams and James Madison especially. We're not worried about Ben Franklin—something tells us he can *still* get it up.

DOC DYES WOMAN'S VAGINA PURPLE AS "JOKE"

IF you think it's funny to hide wheelchairs from the disabled, to give the wrong directions to blind people, or to steal candy from babies, you'll probably get a laugh out of the following story…you sick, bottom-feeding, subhuman bastard.

Dr. Barry W. King is a 58-year-old gynecologist who plies his trade on the vaginas of unsuspecting women in Mesa County, Arizona, none of whom ever expected to walk out of his office with her vagina dyed purple.

King recently pleaded guilty to misdemeanor harassment for an incident in which a female employee and breast-cancer survivor came to him seeking advice regarding her fear that the cancer had returned after she'd found a lesion on her vagina.

The woman says that after King examined her vagina—because that's what gynecologists do, which makes the profession highly vulnerable to being infested by sickos and pervs—he told her, "When you get home tonight, I want you to have (your husband) take a look at it."

She found this strange, seeing as her husband wasn't a doctor.

That night when dabbing her privates with toilet paper at home, she noticed a dark-purple color that she immediately recognized as gentian violet, a dye that's used to treat medical conditions such as thrush.

The woman says that the next day at work, King seemed absolutely "giddy." She then found that he was telling co-workers about his "prank," which was intended to give her husband a purple penis. She felt flustered, violated, humiliated, and outraged:

"I was sexually objectified as a prank on my husband in hopes that his penis would be stained purple. That's disgusting."

The matter was referred to authorities, who initially investigated King for sexual assault but eventually had him plead guilty to misdemeanor harassment. So long as he doesn't get in trouble over the next two years, he will not spend a day in jail.

Mamas, don't let your baby girls grow up to visit male gynecologists who dye vaginas purple.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY KOSTYANTYN IVANYSHEN

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY VASILYAN AKOP

RANDY DOLPHIN TORMENTS FRENCH SWIMMERS

AS traumatic and soul-scarring as sexual abuse at the hands of another human is, how much more humiliating and psychologically crippling is it to be sexually assaulted by a sea creature that resembles a giant gray penis?

Due to multiple reports of swimmers receiving unwanted sexual attention at the hands—er, fins—of a male bottlenose dolphin nicknamed "Zafar," the mayor of the French village of Landévennec has banned swimming and diving in the Bay of Brest. The mayor has ordered all beachgoers to remain at least 50 yards away from Zafar at all times to prevent further sexually rude and entirely problematic behavior by the randy cetacean—it's as if the entire town has taken out a restraining order against the priapic sea mammal.

Elizabeth Hawkins works at Dolphin Research Australia and is apparently an apologist for sexually predatory dolphins. She excuses Zafar's "aggressive" and "pushy" sexual antics—which include rubbing his horny dolphin body up against horrified swimmers—as the result of him being a "social outcast." Without having ever met or apparently talked to Zafar, Hawkins feels qualified to read his little dolphin mind and say that he is "wanting, needing, yearning social contact from cohorts, and that need isn't fulfilled," at which point "strange behaviors come out."

Zafar's "playful" behavior includes allowing swimmers to hold onto his dorsal fin while he takes them for "rides" out into deeper water—at which point he often attempts to take them on an entirely different and far more sinister type of "ride."

According to Hawkins: "It's been observed that dolphins and different whale species will rub themselves against objects with what appears to be some type of sexual satisfaction coming about."

We will only note that she mentions people passively "observe" this behavior. She said nothing about them nobly rushing in and prying the dolphin away from his next hapless sexual assault victim. They just sit around and "observe" the dolphin as he indulges his filthy carnal desires.

The word "accessories" comes to mind....

CLIT COLLECTOR SENTENCED TO LIFE

SOME people collect stamps. Others collect comic books or toy action figures. But Danish national Peter Frederiksen collected clitorises.

When South African police raided Frederiksen's house in 2015 on suspicion of multiple crimes, they found 21 human clitorises in his freezer. It remains unclear how he obtained the collection—whether through mail order, or by personally removing them from 21 women. And if it was the latter, it remains unclear whether Frederiksen used some sort of sharp object or his own teeth. News reports do not specify how many of the clits belonged to women who are still alive.

Frederiksen's wife, Anna Matseliso Molise, was a suspected witch. The police raid of their house turned up tinfoil packages containing human hair, as well as wine and champagne corks upon which names and dates had been written. Frederiksen later allegedly had his wife-turned-key witness killed outside their home by a wheelchair-bound man, which added conspiracy to commit murder atop Frederiksen's dozens of other charges.

The clitoris coveting psychopath was eventually found guilty of rape, assault, fraud, possession of unregistered medication, conspiracy to commit murder, illegally transporting human tissue, and production of child pornography. Despite the 21 frozen clits, he stands by his claims that all those photos of naked underage girls were merely part of an innocent research project about female circumcision.

Frederiksen was sentenced to two life terms in prison, where the only clitorises he is likely to encounter will be attached to female prison guards, who are notoriously scrappy and protective of their naughty bits.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY ANDY PIATT

STEAMED VAGINA

DID your mother, bless her heart, ever try to steer you away from danger by saying something like, "If Johnny Johnson jumped off a bridge, would you do it, too?"

By the same reasoning, if Gwyneth Paltrow, Chrissy Teigen, or Busy Philipps steamed their vaginas, would you do it, too?

Vaginal steaming is some cockamamie New Age practice which preaches that if you squat your unsuspecting vag over a steaming pot of herbs, you'll get freshened, cleansed, and de-funkified.

Here's *Dawson's Creek* star Busy Philipps, who recently steamed her vagina to clear her sinuses because, apparently, she has a very *loooong* vagina that reaches all the way up into her head:

"It felt nice! ... If it's good enough for Gwyneth, it's good enough for all of us! ... You sit on this chair and they put a pot under you which smells of chamomile tea and the steam just goes up…. I don't even know really what it's supposed to do!"

Medical experts, though, suggest that the steam might have gone up to Philipps's brain. They say there are no health benefits to vag steaming, only risks, because the herbs can cause irritation and infection. There's also the danger of *boiling* one's vagina, and we wouldn't wish a boiled vagina on anyone. Well, almost anyone.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY NEJRON PHOTO

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY ISABELLA PFENNINGER

A TON O' TESTES

WE have often suspected that the testicles resent the penis just as much as the other two Supremes resented Diana Ross or the two guys crucified on either side of Jesus resented him. The penis gets all the attention while the balls are, at best, an unfortunate afterthought.

To right this injustice, we bring you a trio of short, testicle-related tales to slake your scrotal thirst.

A brewery in Iceland is producing a seasonal beer called Hvalur. Into each batch is plopped a 15- to 18-pound whale testicle that has been smoked in sheep's dung. They also use crystal-clear Icelandic water from a glacier that's been melting for 600 years, but as nice as that sounds, it doesn't quite take the edge off the idea that the rest of it tastes like smoked sheep shit and whale balls. According to one reviewer, it's not that bad—he says it tastes "like a porter with hints of caramel and a smoky, almost meaty aftertaste."

Moving from Iceland over to Norway, Claus Jørstad is a middle-aged man whose knee injury makes it difficult for him to stand while showering. To make things more comfortable for himself—or so he thought—Jørstad toted a red metal Ikea chair into his shower and proceeded to get one of his testicles stuck in the giant Swiss cheese holes that for some reason the chair's designers thought were necessary to incorporate into the seat.

Apparently, Jørstad sat down on the chair while taking a hot shower and, at some point, one of his testicles slipped through one of the holes. Since heat causes things to expand, his swollen ball became stuck in the hole, which caused instant panic and humiliation for Jørstad—but apparently not enough to stop him from posting about it on Facebook:

"Sitting there and noticing the accident, I bent down to see what the fuck happened, I realized the little nutter has got stuck…. I couldn't fucking move…. And as I couldn't move, I started pondering how the hell I was gonna get outta the mess. After a lot of pondering forth and back, I realised I had no bloody ideas."

Thankfully for Jørstad, the shower water began running cold, causing his imprisoned testicle to shrink and escape from the metal hellhole in which it had been trapped. We wish Jørstad and his testicle much luck in future showering endeavors.

Last, but not least, there was Wesley Warren Jr., the poor guy in Las Vegas who achieved fleeting notoriety as a result of his 132.5-pound testicle. It was so large that he had to cover it with an upside-down hoodie whenever he rode the bus. But in 2013, after a 13-hour surgery, his monster nut was removed.

Now that Mr. Warren has recovered, he no longer bears the shame of having a testicle that weighed as much as the average adult woman. On the other hand, he must endure the new shame of having only one testicle—just like Hitler!

HEIGHTS OF FAME

Tall Movie Actors Have to Find Their Niche.

BY PAUL JAMES

I MAY not have money, I may not have good looks, and I may not be talented, but I do have one consolation when it comes to comparing myself to Hollywood's leading men—at six-foot-six, I tower above most of them.

(On the minus side? Movie theater seating tends to crush my knees.)

There's an old bit of Hollywood wisdom postulating that the ideal physique for male movie stars is a combination of compact body and big head. "Most movie stars are short," writes screenwriter and Hollywood sage William Goldman in his book *Which Lie Did I Tell?* "Most of them are smaller than you think, and all of them are more frightened than you think."

Ironically, many of the most iconic, larger-than-life actors in Hollywood history are, or were, shorter than or right at five-nine, the average height of the American male. Marlon Brando was five-nine. So was Paul Newman. And they both had an inch on Humphrey Bogart and James Dean. Al Pacino stands just five-seven, which makes him an inch taller than Dustin Hoffman. Richard Dreyfuss, of *Jaws* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* fame, is a pint-sized five-four—shorter than Michael J. Fox! Some of today's biggest names also stand shorter than the American average: Mark Wahlberg is five-eight, and Tom Cruise and Sylvester "Rocky Balboa" Stallone are a dinky five-seven.

Still, there are some actors six-three or taller who have managed to carve out a place for themselves in Hollywood. My chances at stardom expired a long time ago, but in hopes of aiding any young Stretch Armstrongs out there, I have analyzed the career paths of these strapping actors and identified five cinematic categories you must choose from if you hope to emulate them.

We can dispense with the first one pretty quickly: **Action Gods**. This category is reserved for performers so large their size is almost a visual joke: *Aquaman* and *Game of Thrones* star Jason Momoa (six-four), *Magic Mike* scene-stealer Joe Manganiello (six-five), and, of course, human charisma bomb Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, who stands an adamantine six-three. If you're lucky enough to fit into this category, be aware that it's often smart to find yourself a shrimpy male costar to humanize you, like The Rock did with Kevin Hart or Manganiello did to delightful effect with Pee-wee Herman in *Pee-wee's Big Holiday*.

Closely related to this category are **Character Actor Freaks**. These are guys who use their size for menace rather than heroism. (Think of them as the stepchildren of Richard Kiel, the seven-foot-two living special effect from the James Bond movies *Moonraker* and *The Spy Who Loved Me*.)

Six-foot-three Michael Shannon is my favorite example of this type: He has a way of evoking pathos with his hulking frame and Frankenstein-like visage, whether it's squirming in a too-small suit in *Revolutionary Road* or seething with repressed desire in *Boardwalk Empire* and *The Shape of Water*. James Cromwell (six-foot-six) was the embodiment of kindliness as Farmer Hoggett in *Babe,* but he's even more memorable as Captain Dudley Smith in *L.A. Confidential,* looming over his underlings, as elongated, soft-spoken, and malevolent as Slender Man.

On the other end of the spectrum you have what I'm calling **Goofs and Galoots**. These are overgrown kids like Will Ferrell (six-three), Jason Segel (six-four), and Vince Vaughn (six-five)—men with soft bellies and puppy-dog eyes who somehow grew up to be giants without ever maturing emotionally past their early twenties. Ferrell is practically impossible to take seriously as an adult—even if he starts out as an alpha-male character, as in *Anchorman* or *Talladega Nights,* he's always only a couple of setbacks away from chugging milk, running around half-naked, and weeping like a baby. Segel is the most vulnerable of this batch; the shock-comedy sight of his naked penis in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* wouldn't be half as funny (or poignant) if not for the doughy, oversized body attached to it. Let's put Tim Robbins (six-five) in this category, too, in recognition of his peerless work as the wild-armed pitcher Nuke LaLoosh in *Bull Durham* and corporate patsy Norville Barnes in *The Hudsucker Proxy*.

Robbins might also have a place in the fourth classification: **Gentle Giants**. These are big men with tender hearts, like John Lithgow, or early-career Liam Neeson (both six-four). While it's true that Lithgow has probably played just as many villains as, say, Michael Shannon (especially in nineties thrillers like *Cliffhanger, Ricochet,* and *Raising Cain*), those roles never really affected Lithgow's cuddly real-life persona. When Neeson reinvented himself as an action star in *Taken,* part of the thrill was seeing that sweet, sensitive Irish soul with the perpetually haunted expression (just watch him getting pushed around by Judy Davis in Woody Allen's *Husbands and Wives*) suddenly striding around the world and remorselessly beating up Albanian sex traffickers.

Finally, we arrive at the most exclusive group of all: **Lanky Dreamboats**. When playing a tall-celebrity round of "Fuck, Marry, Kill," these are guys who, 99 percent of the time, will land in the "Marry" camp. Here's where you'll find six-foot-five Armie Hammer, who stumbled in a series of flops after breaking through playing the Winklevoss twins in *The Social Network,* but has managed to rebound by unleashing his quirky charm in smart indies like *Sorry to Bother You*. The instantly meme-able dance moves he displayed in *Call Me By Your Name* should be studied by big dudes everywhere figuring out how to look good on the dance floor.

Hopefully, Hammer has as long a career as his fellow lady-killer Jeff Goldblum (six-four). Plenty of dorks have hoped to make "neurotic, self-deprecating stammering" into a technique for picking up girls, but nobody has done it as irresistibly as Goldblum. He made mansplaining seem sexy in *Jurassic Park,* he made typing on a computer seem heroic in *Independence Day,* and even at the age of 66, he had an undeniable pansexual charm presiding over the gladiator ring in *Thor: Ragnarok*. Goldblum is also one of the only movie-star tall guys who found an equally tall gal, Geena Davis (a gorgeous six-footer), to share his life on the screen and off. Ah, if only all of us beanpoles could be so lucky!

Paul James is a playwright, editor, broadcaster, and a film and pop culture commentator for CBC Radio, Salon, and Eighteen Bridges magazine. He is the cohost of the podcast Trash, Art & the Movies. Follow him on Twitter @myelbow

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Jeff Goldblum at the In Style Awards, Hollywood, 2018

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY DFREE

film society lincoln center
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Liam Neeson at the New York Film Festival, 2018

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY LEV RADIN

DREAM, BABY, DREAM

It's Time for Music to Get Weird.

BY ZACHARY LIPEZ

AS we head into 2019, let's entertain the notion that things can only get better.

Fanciful, I know. I won't bore you with a laundry list of everything I believe is wrong these days. And of course we might not see eye to eye on all the items I'd put on that list. But hopefully we can agree on this general wish: I'd like to see a year filled with music that does more than simply provide solace and distraction. Not that I look down my nose at these things. But in the end, shouldn't art, in terms of ultimate goals, aim higher than to soothe and distract? Call me an *Anne of Green Gables* dreamer, but I'm choosing to indulge in visions of big, bold music for 2019. A bumper crop of great songs, made by people I won't be embarrassed to call "daddy" or "queen" on Instagram.

Here are my five wishes for music—wishes backed by prayer, and, if need be, payola.

1) A funk-metal revival. Why do you laugh? Look, I won't pretend this brief, pre-grunge genre was the *best* musical thing that's happened in our lifetimes. I mean, I don't break out my Psychefunkapus cassettes all that often. Like with ska, bands that added slap bass to thrash riffs had an unfortunate habit of shoehorning the word "funk" into their names. It was abundantly silly music that often lacked the lyrical heft of, uh, Red Hot Chili Peppers.

But there was also an appealing genre schizophrenia—a winning duality—that, when thumping in the sure hands of musicians like the dudes in Primus and Fishbone, felt brash and free. Or maybe I'm just bristling at the current nu-metal revival. (For those not following this stuff, nu-metal began with nineties rap-rock bands like Linkin Park and Limp Bizkit, and now...it's back.) If I'm going to have to live through white people with dreadlocks again, I'd like it to be accompanied by a horn section, not a backward baseball cap.

Incidentally, if funk-metal can't come back, how about electroclash? Adults in crotchless rompers mixing new wave, techno, synth-pop, and performance art—who's with me?

2) Ex-wife country music. It would replace bro-country. Yes, I'm listening to the excellent new Pistol Annies album, *Interstate Gospel,* as I write this. I don't have any skin in the "real country" versus "fake country" debate game. But I must say, the fact that the songs on this album don't sound like Bon Jovi B-sides is a real plus. Also, it occurs to me that since there might be two or three ex-husbands reading this, I should probably amend my term and express a wish for...ex-*spouse* country music. Songs made by grown-ups that put a premium on living lives where love is believed in, at least fleetingly, and the stakes have real weight. People falling in love, proclaiming that love in front of God and family, and then, when it all falls apart, writing songs about something other than a pickup truck and the Daisy Dukes moldering in the cargo bed.

3) Adult-alienating hip-hop. I'm 43. I don't want to relate to what the kids like, because that would mean these kids are fucking boring. I want their music culture to baffle me. More face tattoos! More repetition of catch phrases over synth lines written on Texas Instruments calculators! Hell, more nihilism, if that's what the kids are feeling. Who am I to tell them there's a whole world of emotions to explore when the benzos run out? I hope that by December 31, 2019, I feel like Frank Sinatra at a Black Flag concert. Bing Crosby at GWAR. I want to be beaten to death by their skateboards as I sputter, "In my day, we

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / BY OLGA VISAVI

listened to *real* music—like Tone Loc's 'Funky Cold Medina.'" Maybe that's not how you would choose to check out, but I'd be fine getting ushered into the sweet hereafter by Lil' Transient A$AP Pillduck or whomever.

4) The Chainsmokers get extinguished. Remember, this is just a wish list. I'm sorry for this negative puff. I'm sure they're nice guys (not really), this electronic dance music duo from the East Coast, Alex and Andrew, brown-haired young Americans. Unfortunately, their songs make me think of residual STDs scraped off the sides of a communal hotel hot tub during cleaning. And also, I don't like them very much.

5) Resurgent music gets its due. I'm hoping, in 2019, that listeners and critics alike realize that "new" is not the most important thing about music. (If it's even important at all.) Of course, blatantly ripping people off is bullshit, but I wish for the adoption of a folk-music model. Meaning, if an artist today sounds like an older artist, it doesn't mean they automatically suck. I'm not interested in getting bogged down in, say, the great Greta Van Fleet debate. True, they are most assuredly a Led Zeppelin facsimile, and just as assuredly are not my bag of frost giants. But if this band did exactly what they do with Zep for, say, Roxy Music or Lords of Acid, I'd be delighted.

People should be able to like what they like, and to see and hear that music in places beyond their phones. I just hope for the palette of influential old bands to be expanded beyond what it is today. There's a bunch of great, overlooked outfits from the past. I hope new musicians buy their records and copy these bands instead. During this process, as a host of young bands inevitably do it wrong, one in a thousand will come up with something truly original. (By the way, if you do enjoy Greta Van Fleet, I highly recommend you seek out the first album by seventies German rockers Lucifer's Friend.)

While being cool with familiar, comfort-food music, my ears open to the aural equivalent of Waffle House fare, I also hope, finally, that young musicians—safe in the knowledge that the future is grim—consequently get weirder and weirder. And I hope old musicians use their proximity to the grave as an excuse to do the same. The fact that Nick Cave is now a stadium act, to cite one example, gives permission to other aging musicians to do as Cave does and indulge their love of cabaret and ghost stories. Or consider Lorde, the electropop hit-maker from New Zealand, playing arenas on her 2018 *Melodrama* tour with opening acts Mitski, a New York indie songwriter, and hip-hop supergroup Run the Jewels. Such things tell young musicians that no industry insider knows anything, and that "pop" being short for "popular" can mean anything, now that the industry itself is dead.

The days of Beatles- or Michael Jackson-level communal experiences are over. The kids are making wild noise on computers, powered by dreams and Narcan. Rap doesn't even have to rhyme anymore, baby. People say algorithms are the future, and they might be right, or maybe that's just a thing to tell your Uber driver so you seem smart. Predicting the future is like telling God's doorman that you're on the guest list, plus one. It's all pointless probably, but who's complaining. There's nothing—least of all money—to lose, so let's get weird.

Zachary Lipez is a writer and bartender in New York City. He is the author (with collaborators Stacy Wakefield and Nick Zinner) of "131 Different Things."

MAN OF THE MOMENT

MIKE KROL

ALBUM COVER PHOTO BY EMILY SHUR

MIKE Krol knew he was fucked the minute he fell in love with music.

"It was pretty instant once I discovered it," the 34-year-old garage-rock musician tells *Penthouse*. "I knew that nothing else in the world would move me the way music did. It's always been and always will be the most important thing in my life, and the only form of self-expression that leaves me feeling completely satisfied."

Since moving from his hometown of Milwaukee to Los Angeles, Krol signed to Merge Records. In late January, he releases his sophomore record with the label, *Power Chords,* a fuzzed-out, low-fi punk album driven by infectious hooks. As with his earlier albums (*Turkey, Trust Fund,* and *I Hate Jazz*), Krol isn't afraid to get catchy while chronicling angry personal pain.

"[Music] ruined my life because once I started to express myself through it, I knew that it was the only thing that truly made me feel alive–and unfortunately it's hard to write good songs, making it the cause of many late nights feeling unfulfilled," Krol says. "But I wouldn't have it any other way because the payoff is too sweet."

So does Krol hate the love that ruined his life?

"I wouldn't ever say I hate music," he says. "I hate certain *types* of music, but music itself never lets me down. The music *business* on the other hand–that's a love/hate relationship for sure."

We sat down with Krol to talk about what's been going on since the first single on *Power Chords* dropped.

What's with Midwesterners bottling up their anger?
I think it has something to do with the weather. You spend a good chunk of the year hiding indoors from snow, rain, or frigid temperatures and accepting less-than-ideal conditions that are out of your control. I feel like that way of thinking inevitably creeps into other areas of your life, and before you know it, you're just angry at everything but feeling totally powerless.

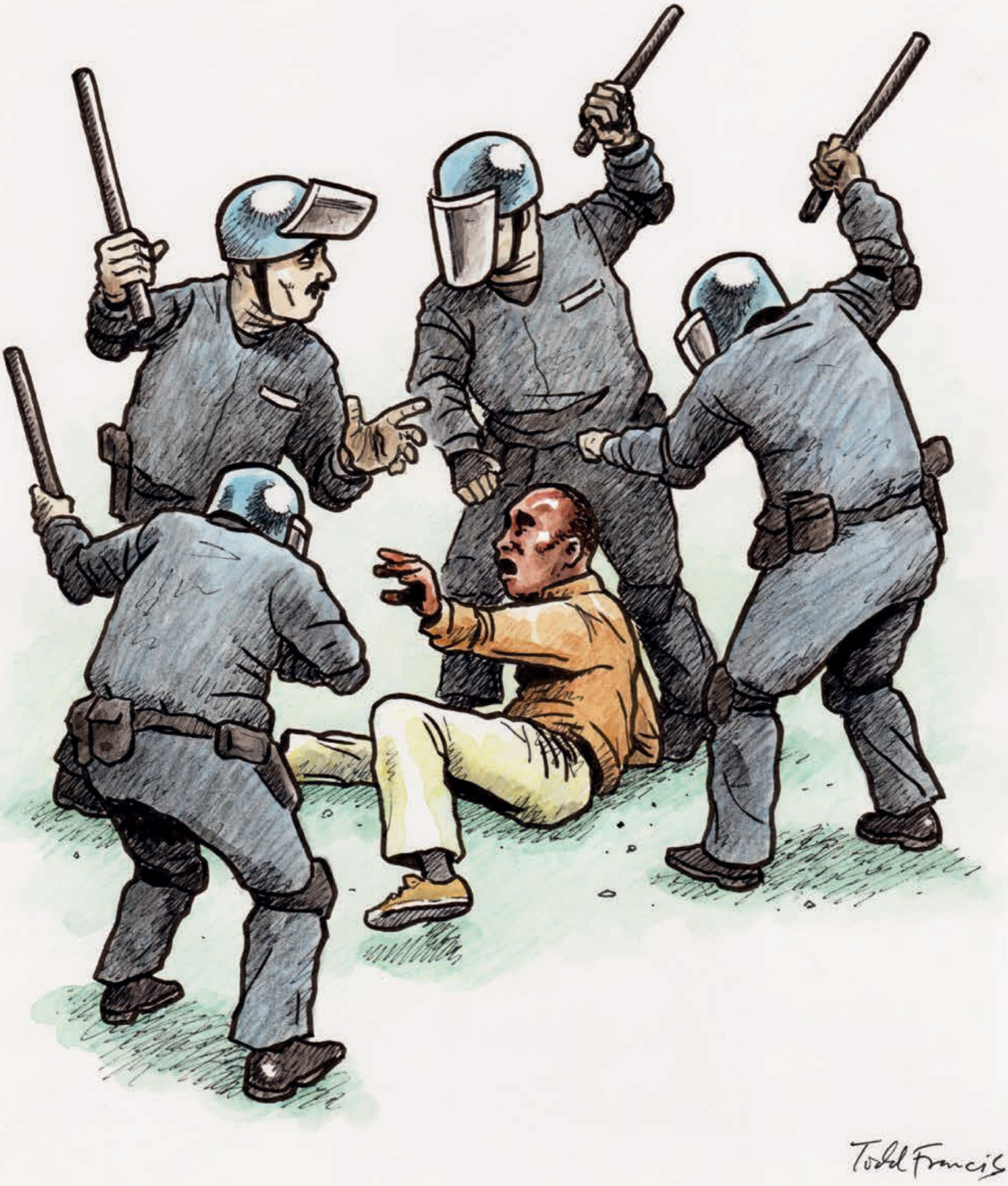
What are the lyrical themes running through *Power Chords*?
I'd say the main lyrical theme is self-acceptance and growth. Trusting your instincts, addressing your shortcomings, and finding your voice again after feeling like you lost it. It's about the love of music and how the discovery of a person, place, or thing can shake you to your core, and give you life and power in a way that nothing else can.

What was your writing process like during this record, and did you have to fight any demons along the way?
So many demons! Although this is technically my fourth album, it was my second on Merge, and the first album that I've ever released where there was an actual audience interested in and aware of what I was doing. The pressure was on, and I didn't have my usual "dance like no one is watching" mind-set. So, I definitely fell into the "sophomore slump," where I questioned every decision made and felt like giving up and throwing the whole thing away at so many points in the process. Mostly I struggled with what I should be writing about. And so, naturally, that's what I ended up writing about: self-doubt and criticism that ultimately grows into forgiveness and strength.

What are your top three albums since your teen years?
That's easy. The first would be Weezer's *Blue Album*. That was the gateway into my whole existence. Second would be The Strokes' *Is This It*. That album came out when I was a senior in high school, and it single-handedly changed the course of my life and led me to move to New York City for college. Lastly would be Violent Femmes' first album, which I was exposed to all throughout my childhood in Milwaukee, and being close friends with bassist Brian Ritchie's nephew, but it didn't really click until I moved away from home. I would put it on whenever I was homesick. It taught me more about myself than I'll ever be able to explain.

Why did you want to learn guitar in the first place?
Purely out of necessity, because I wanted to be in a band and have original songs. My main instrument is the drums, and what I grew up playing in school and taking lessons for. Around junior year, I wanted to start a band but didn't know anybody who could write songs. So I borrowed a guitar from a friend and figured out how to play power chords and bar chords, and I started to write the songs. Then I got into home recording and using 4-tracks. That was the start of my one-man-band, bedroom-recording project that I'm currently still exploring.

Do you remember seeing *Penthouse* magazine when you were young?
Man, I wish I had some great story about this, but I was definitely a late bloomer in that department! When this article publishes, it will be the first *Penthouse* that I have bought or been in possession of.


Todd Francis

"Can't we just shoot him? This is killing my abs."

CRUSH

ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ

SINCE her upset victory over incumbent congressman and Democratic Caucus chairman Joe Crowley in the New York primaries in June, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has captivated the masses with her innovative grassroots campaigning and unabashed rebukes of senseless politics.

Among the wishy-washy, big-money politicians that typically populate Washington, this Bronx-born badass stands out as one of the few bright spots in an otherwise drab political machine. She's basically a Democrat's wet dream: she's young, she's driven, she's outspoken and magnanimous, and, most importantly, she's not an old white man.

Progressive socialism has never looked so good.

Every time Ocasio-Cortez ruthlessly roasts trolls on Twitter or holds impromptu Q&A's while making black bean soup, her already cult-like following is only bolstered, because, honestly, what's not to love?

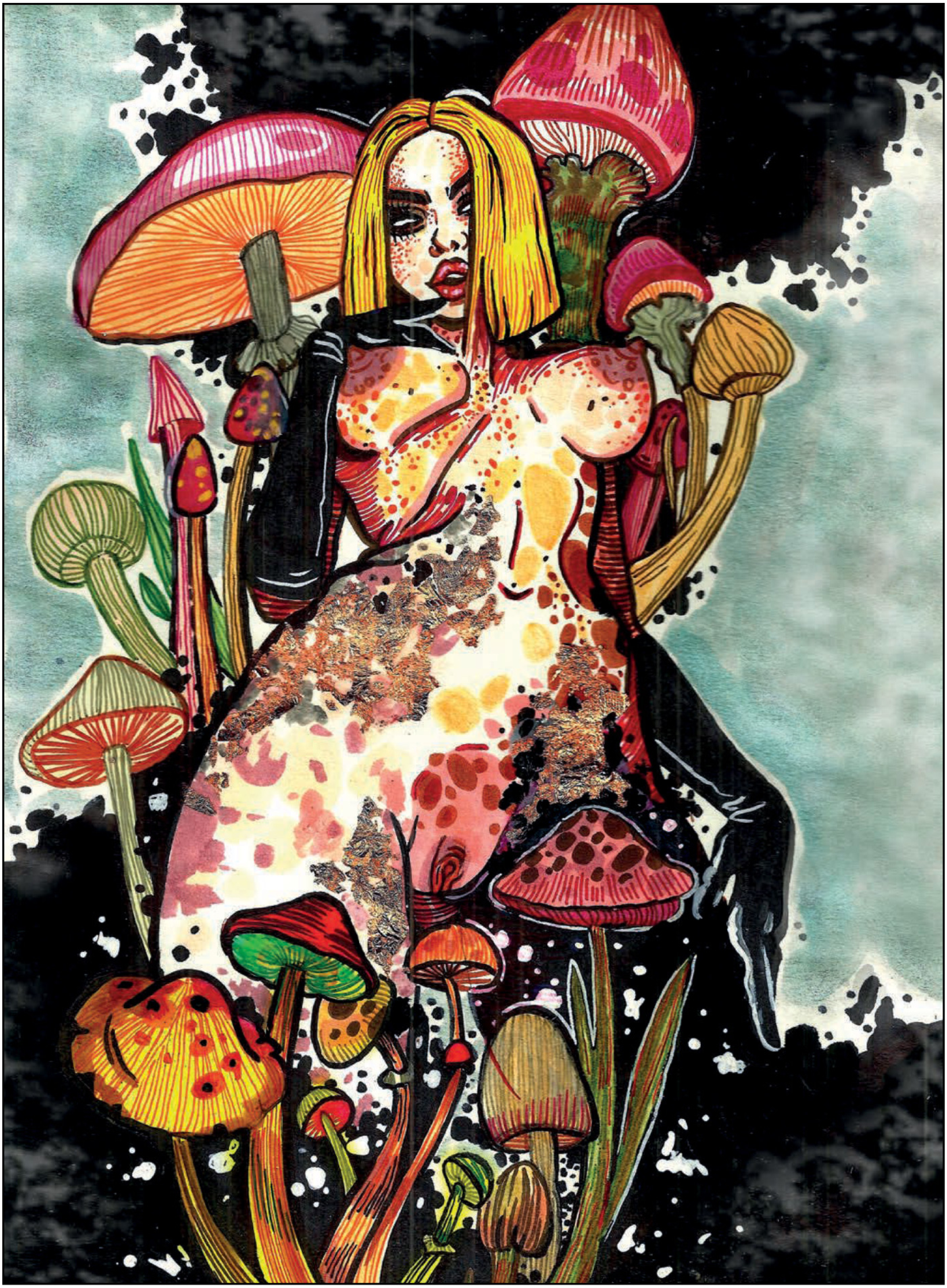
A true champion of the working class, this proud daughter of Puerto Rican parents has actually lived the struggle. Fresh out of college, when most of her politician peers were taking six-figure positions, she instead returned home to work as bartender and waitress to help keep her family's apartment out of foreclosure.

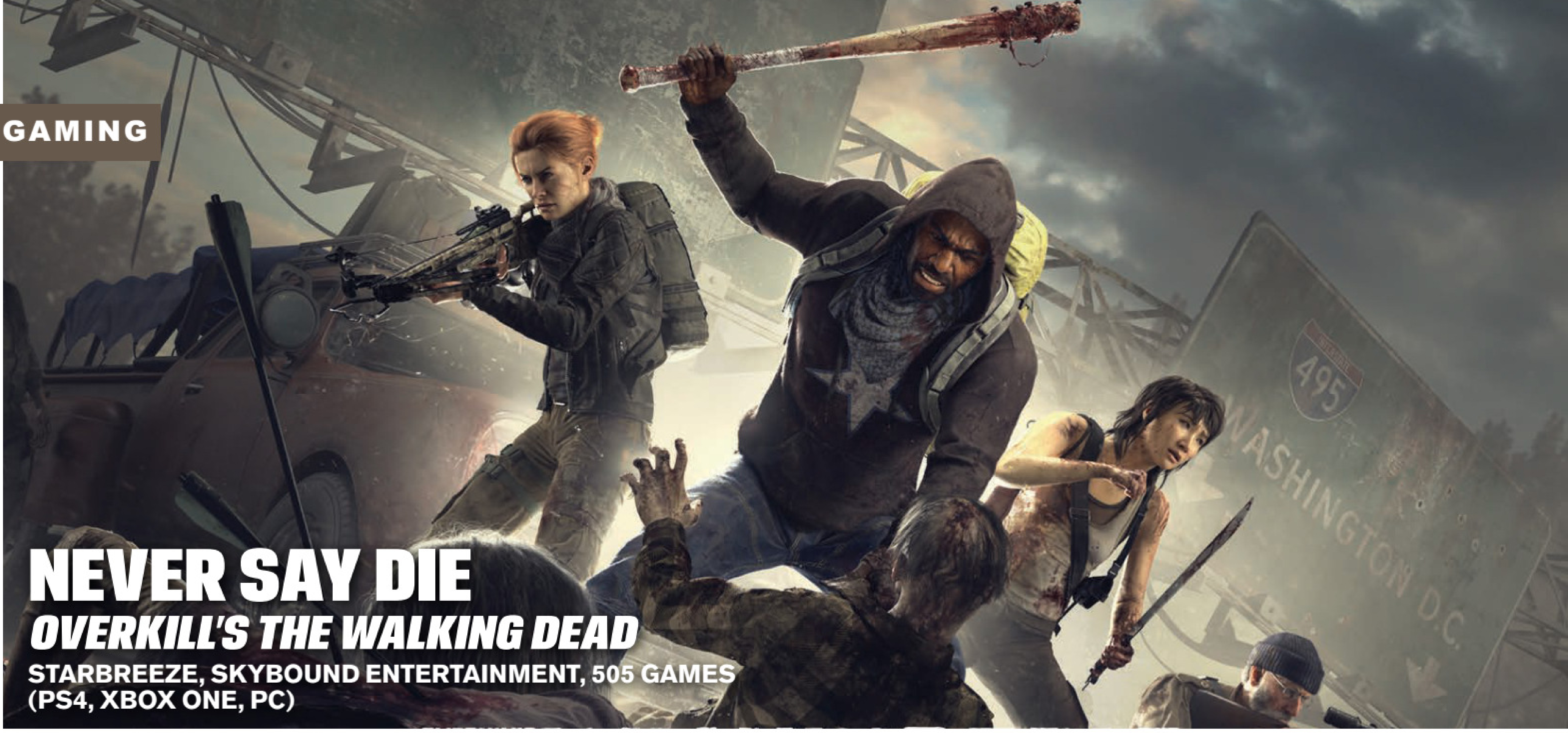
At 29 years old, not only is Ocasio-Cortez set to become the youngest woman to ever serve in Congress, but she's also already proven herself capable of standing up to corporate cronies on both sides of the aisle.

Less than a week after a one-sided victory in the polls, the freshman congresswoman was seen rallying with climate-change demonstrators waging a sit-in outside the office of fellow Democrat Nancy Pelosi. Her calls for a "Green Deal," while lambasted by some pundits, later prompted Pelosi to tweet that she was "deeply inspired" by the display and that she would "strongly support" creating a committee to address climate concerns.

Meanwhile on the right, Ocasio-Cortez found herself in the crosshairs of everyone from Donald Trump and Tucker Carlson to political zombies Joe Lieberman and Sarah Palin, even before she was sworn into office. And if you're pissing off this crowd, you must be doing something right.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY KATHERINE WELLES





NEVER SAY DIE

OVERKILL'S THE WALKING DEAD

STARBREEZE, SKYBOUND ENTERTAINMENT, 505 GAMES (PS4, XBOX ONE, PC)

BETWEEN the bitter ends of both *The Walking Dead* series hero Rick Grimes and Telltale Games's acclaimed adventure series based on the comic book, life isn't particularly terrific for fans of the ambulatory deceased. Now, developer Overkill Software is offering a consolation prize for the franchise faithful: a four-player cooperative shooter set shortly after the outbreak of the undead apocalypse. Unfamiliarity with the show isn't a barrier to entry; the game's makers worked closely with Robert Kirkman, cocreator of the source material, to forge a standalone story, this one based in Washington, D.C. You choose from one of several new characters, each with a unique backstory, skill set, and strategic role in the squad. Team up with pals online to stock and protect your own corner of the urban hellscape from walkers and rival human scavengers alike.

Despite appearances, *The Walking Dead* isn't a zombified *Call of Duty*. The goal here is to survive rather than to exterminate everything that moves. Players must make do with improvised weapons: silencers that aren't always silent, gunsights that don't aim right, assault rifles that jam. Walkers and scavengers are attracted by sound just like on the TV show, so you'll need to tread softly and carry a big barbwire-wrapped stick. Car alarms will ring the walker dinner bell; use them to lure hordes to enemy encampments.

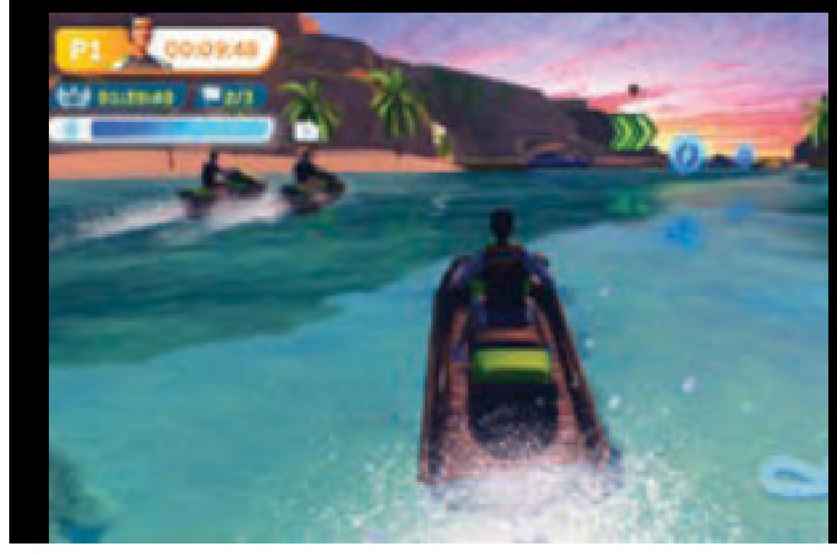
Just like in Telltale Games's excellent episodic adventures (definitely worth downloading if you haven't already), *The Walking Dead*'s sprawling plot will evolve over time, with expansions planned post-release. Your journey begins in Georgetown and other desolate D.C. neighborhoods as you and your team systematically scour the nation's capital for loot, then continue into new regions as your neo-society carves out its niche. Plan your raids and encampment defenses carefully: Just like on the TV show, the living are often more dangerous than the dead.

PRO BOWL: COMPETITIVE GAMES BEST PLAYED WITH BUDS

> 4 <

SPORTS PARTY (UBISOFT, NINTENDO SWITCH)

Downhill skateboarding, Jetski racing, beach tennis, Frisbee golf, regular golf—this four-player party pack is worth picking up just for the variety of events. Each sport also takes advantage of the Joy-Con controller in a way that might give you Wii Sports flashbacks (in a good way). Players can take their system on the go and toss virtual Frisbees outdoors...or, you know, toss real Frisbees, too, we guess.



> 3 <

POOL PANIC (ADULT SWIM, NINTENDO SWITCH, PC)

Billed as the world's "least realistic pool simulator," this oddball indie adventure has you rolling through a planet-spanning billiards table as a cue ball keen on knocking over the world. Players pass the controller to unleash trick shots in more than a hundred quick-hit challenges, sinking bat balls in caves, bouncing off Boy Scouts in forests, and fleeing zombies that'll infect your cue if you're not careful.

> 2 <

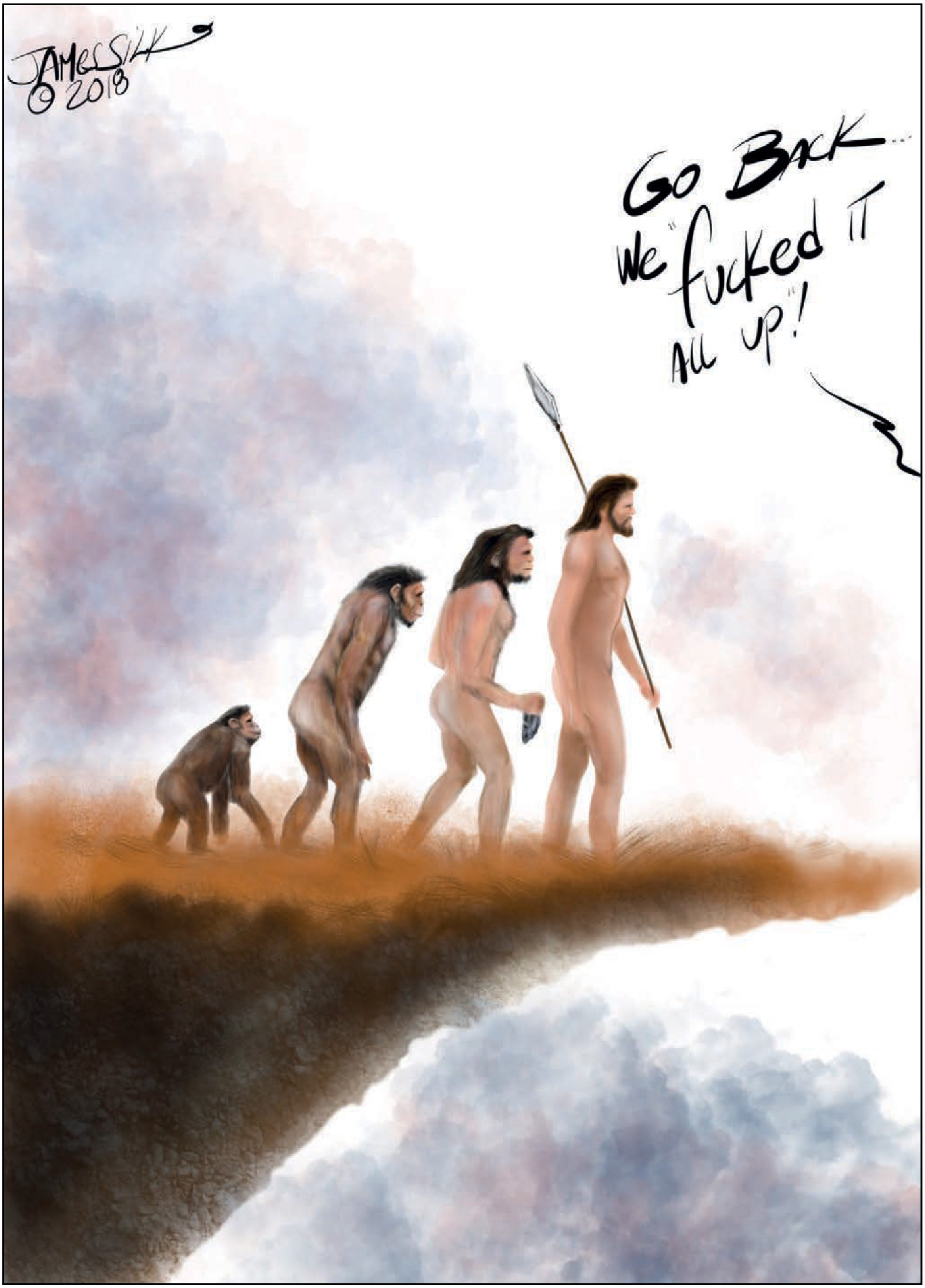
NBA 2K: PLAYGROUNDS 2 (2K GAMES, PS4, XBOX ONE, NINTENDO SWITCH, PC)

Up to four players choose from a roster of more than 400 current and retired NBA ballers and take to the streets in this throwback to sports games that focused more on arcade action than realism. Courts range from NYC alleyways to California boardwalks, and every dunk, layup, and crossover is larger than life and becomes supercharged with each made shot.

> 1 <

JACKBOX PARTY PACK 5 (JACKBOX GAMES, PS4, XBOX ONE, PC, MAC, IOS)

The *You Don't Know Jack* party games were always best played at the end of the night and under the influence. This offshoot is even more loosey-goosey, with support for smartphone devices and up to eight players in contests that require more than just a Wikipedic knowledge of pop culture. Freestyle rap battles and player-judged doodling contests will engage every lobe of your melon.


JAMES SILK
© 2018
GO BACK...
we "fucked IT
ALL UP"!

HOMEGROWN HIGH

Now is the time to grow your own cannabis.

BY WILLIAM LEE

AS POT legalization takes over both the United States (piecemeal) and our neighbors to the north (wholesale), there has never been a better time to legally cultivate your own cannabis. Just ask Nikki Lastreto and Swami Chaitanya—each cannabis royalty in their own right—who run a sun-grown organic cannabis operation in California called Swami Select.

"A lot of times with farmers, they'll grow smaller batches that are often more potent," Chaitanya says. "They're giving so much energy and love to those few plants."

Here are some fast tips to get you up and growing—then lying back and smoking—some fine outdoor cannabis.

1

A Pot for Your Pot

Organic potting soil is best, though Miracle-Gro works, too. If you plan to grow it in a pot, consider getting a Smart Pot, which is made of fabric and will foster bigger, healthier plants. Chaitanya recommends the tan-colored ones, which won't heat up the roots.

2

Pick Your Plant

When choosing your plant, research whether it's high in CBD or THC. CBD produces the body high, THC is more of a head high—perfect for chilling out with headphones and listening to music.

3

Seed or Clone?

Clones are little plants selected by dispensaries to produce top-quality medicine—with the proper care, of course.

"You never know what you're going to get with a seed," Lastreto says. "It's riskier, but much more exciting, because it's like having two kids. You don't know if one's going to be blonde or brunette."

4

Heat Check

The best temperature range for growing is between 70 and 85 degrees. When your plant starts to flower, a little cooler (65 to 85 degrees) is perfectly okay.

CANNABIS ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES SILK

William Lee is a writer from Chicago, Illinois.

5

Let There Be Light

About eight to ten hours of light is ideal. More is better.

6

Soil Matters

“When you’re growing cannabis, it’s all in the soil,” says Joshua Mezher, cofounder of marijuana home-grow kit company A Pot for Pot. “That’s the main special source of our kit, specifically formulated to work with cannabis. We put 17 ingredients and a lot of experience into creating a soil environment that allows marijuana to thrive.”

7

Ripe for Picking

Cannabis is usually ready for harvest about 60 days after it starts flowering. So, if it starts to flower the first week of August, it should be harvest-ready the first week of October.

8

Cure Your Medicine

“You will get the best potency and the best aroma from the terpenes if you cut the plants down before first light, at five or six in the morning,” Lastreto says. “Then hang them upside down, and after about two weeks they’ll be dry. Then put them away in a paper bag.”

9

Chop It Up

When you cut into the stem and it snaps, the pot is dry and ready to trim.

“As farmers for our own personal best, we don’t necessarily trim it all,” Chaitanya says. “We trim as we go. And that might be what you’re doing if it’s your personal stash. You’ll need trimming scissors, which you can get at the grocery store. You don’t want to smoke a lot of the exterior leaf, because that has a lot of chlorophyll, which will hurt your throat. But don’t throw away those really good tiny leaves. Instead, warm them in the oven with some butter or olive oil, and you’ll get an infused oil very easily.”

After that, it’s all kicking back and enjoying the fruits (and flowers) of your labor.

BORDER PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY ANATOLI STYF

OKLAHOMA THUNDER

How a land-rush stampede created the Sooner State.

BY MICHAEL HINGSTON

THESE days, we're all pretty familiar with the layout of the continental United States. But for several decades, America had an odd blank spot in the middle of it. This gap arose not out of some grand design, but brute convenience. And its eventual filling managed to be both completely unbelievable and totally obvious at the same time.

Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as European settlers pressed further inland, the U.S. government systematically pushed indigenous peoples into a parcel of land in the country's center that shrunk with every passing decade. After the Civil War, the feds decided to permanently seize a large portion of what was collectively known as "Indian Territory" from the resident Creek and Seminole Indians. By the 1880s, this now-vacated area of approximately two million acres had a new name: the Unassigned Lands. But the territory wouldn't stay claim-free for long.

Settlers from all sides eyed the Unassigned Lands with unabashed lust. They lobbied Congress, made a stink in the newspapers, and tried every other legal trick they could think of. Then there were the illegal tricks. Groups of "Boomers" made repeated incursions into the territory, anxious to start building the city of their dreams. (When discovered, Boomers were arrested and sent back to Kansas.) After all, the Unassigned Lands were the last piece of America that had yet to be divvied up. It was obvious to everyone involved how much money stood to be made, if you could just be in the right place at the right time.

ROUGHLY 100,000 WOULD-BE SETTLERS SHOWED UP AT THE BORDER, EACH WAITING FOR THEIR CHANCE TO GET A FREE CHUNK OF LAND—PROVIDED THEY COULD REACH IT FIRST.

The right time turned out to be noon on April 22, 1889. At that pre-ordained moment, the United States government would officially open up the Unassigned Lands to the general public. The ensuing hysteria, writes Sam Anderson in his excellent 2018 book *Boom Town,* "spread worldwide." Roughly 100,000 would-be settlers showed up at the border, from all across the globe, each waiting for their chance to get a free chunk of land—provided they could reach it first. "Everyone wanted to be 15 minutes ahead of everyone else," one settler wrote, "and no one wanted to be 15 minutes behind anyone."

The stakes were high. And the border, all 300 loosely guarded miles of it, was susceptible to cheaters. Plus, it being the nineteenth century and all, there was a general disagreement among settlers about when, exactly, noon struck. To try to clear things up, the military on the western border announced it by firing gunshots into the air; on the north, soldiers released a rope that had been blocking the entrance; to the south, a lone bugler blew his horn. And from there, they were off. Oklahoma was born.

The cheaters got in first, because of course they did. The much-coveted site of what would become Oklahoma City, for instance, was miles away from the border in every direction. Yet within minutes of noon being declared, tents were being plunked onto all the best spots. It turned out that ambitious settlers had hid themselves in pretty much any available nook or cranny: up in trees, down in streams and gullies, clinging to the undersides of freight cars. The marshals weren't much help in laying down the law, because many of them were busy grabbing their own pieces of land. As Anderson writes, "The settlers of Oklahoma City explored the nearly infinite gradations between cheating and non-cheating." This first, furtive wave of 1889 border-crossers came to be known as "Sooners."

By the end of day one, the population of Oklahoma had increased by tens of thousands of people. And out of that initial frenzy, the familiar trappings of American civilization quickly asserted themselves. Streets and permanent structures were built. Businesses opened their doors to the public. Within a month, the territory boasted six newspapers and five banks.

Oklahoma hasn't forgotten its unusual origin story, either. Reenactments of the Land Run are an annual tradition among schoolchildren (though less so in recent years, due to protests from Native Americans claiming these events celebrate the genocide of their peoples, who were, it should be said, not just kicked off the land but also not allowed to participate in the run afterwards). It's even baked into government lore. Ever since the 1920s, you don't just visit Oklahoma. You visit the "Sooner State."

Michael Hingston is a writer in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. His new book is "Let's Go Exploring," a history and analysis of the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / SEAL BY MICHAL812, BACKGROUND MAP BY SHARON DAY

GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA
LABOR OMNIA VINCIT
1907

CAROL SIMPSON
October 1982

BUSH PILOT

Remember when “long hair don’t care” was a thing? Thankfully, the look of the bush is coming back, big time. Of course, we’ll never go back to the classic 70s wild-child mound, but it’s nice to pay homage to where it all started.

REBECCA, May 1977

RENE LA FONTAINE, January 1977

DANIELLE GINIBRE
November 1979

FASHA, April 1985

JUDY CLAYTON, April 1975

JASMINE ELLIOTT
August 1977

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM BY PETERPHOTO123

NEXT STOP, CYBORGS

How Biohackers Are Reimagining Humanity.

BY MILES RAYMER

IT'S weird, living in the future.

Since the Victorian era, when science fiction began to coalesce as a genre, people have been thinking and talking and writing about what would happen right now, in our time. Past futurists set down wild visions, made outlandish projections as they contemplated life in what is our present. If you've encountered enough of this sci-fi imagining, living in 2019 can feel like existing partly inside someone else's dream of what's to come.

Altering human bodies with technology—an enterprise that blurs the line between science and science fiction past the point of mattering—is one of those possibilities past futurists found themselves contemplating. Since sci-fi's early days, the genre has envisioned an age marked by human-machine hybrids (superpowered limbs, brains with onboard computers) that's remained just beyond the horizon of scientific possibility. Their speculations in turn inspired real-world cybernetics research by scientists who, when asked about where the field is headed, start sounding a lot like science-fiction writers, sketching out ideas that are sure to change our world once we figure out the tech.

These scientists have already conquered problems that seemed insurmountable just a generation ago. They've helped the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and people with debilitating spinal injuries to get up from their wheelchairs and walk. Even if the latest generation of implants only offers relatively lo-fi sensory information and limited gains in mobility, these are still huge, miracle-level accomplishments.

Miraculous as they may be, there remains a wide gap between even the most advanced achievements in cybernetics and what sci-fi has been promising us for the past century or so. No matter how many people have had their lives drastically improved by inventions like cochlear implants, there will always be others wondering where their night-vision cyber eyes and mind-controlled computers are.

So, fed up with the lack of serious mainstream research into the more exotic fringes of cybernetic possibility, a surprising number of people, more hobbyists than experts, are conducting it themselves. They're ignoring the ways of the scientific establishment—and what most people would consider basic common sense—and turning themselves into test beds for the next stage in techno-organic evolution. If we ever end up with night-vision cyber eyes, it'll probably be because of them.

This anarchic field of exploration is part of a broader movement known as biohacking, and as its name implies, it has roots in hacker culture, where the motivating philosophy is that there's nothing on Earth, from personal computers to our carbon-laden atmosphere, that can't be improved with a little freestyle technological modification.

Like the early PC hackers who launched Silicon Valley, biohackers value improvisation and experimentation over more formal paths to progress. They get a kick out of repurposing off-the-shelf gear for purposes the creators probably never intended. They refuse to let traditional ideas of what's possible and what's not get in the way of their wild dreaming. The only difference is that instead of souping up computers, they're trying to upgrade their own bodies.

■ ■ ■

BIOHACKING takes many forms, from the use of nutritional supplements to the recent Silicon Valley fad toward New Age-y practices like meditation and microdosing psychedelic drugs. Adding electronic peripherals to the human body is called "grinding." It was born in the late nineties when two seemingly unrelated trends converged. The shrinking size of electronics had reached a point where it was realistic to start thinking about installing tech in the human body. At the same time, a fringe fascination with aesthetic body modification—traditional tattoos and piercings being only the tip of the iceberg—blossomed into a viable subculture that took root in places around the world, while new techniques developed to accommodate extreme visions like split tongues and subdermal horns.

In 1998, British robotics engineer and cyberneticist Kevin Warwick made headlines around the world by having an RFID chip implanted in his arm by his family doctor. RFID is a passive electronic system—meaning it doesn't need a power source—that has grown increasingly commonplace the smaller the tech has gotten. Today, RFID chips are cheap, plentiful, and available in sizes as small as a grain of sand. They're used in everything from credit cards, passports, and antitheft devices, to tracking shipments, keeping tabs on marathon runners, controlling locks, and just about anything you do by tapping a card against a reader. At the time, Warwick's implant only allowed him to open doors, control lights, and a few other things that were probably just as easy to do without it. But it did give him legitimate rights to the arguable claim that he was the world's first cyborg.

At around the same time, body-modification artist Steve Haworth was experimenting with increasingly radical alterations, using his background in designing medical devices for cosmetic surgeons to create subdermal implants that gave the appearance of horns, bumps, or other simple shapes under the skin. This would lead him to collaborate with body-art icons like the Enigma and the Lizardman. But it was while working with jewelry designer Jesse Jarrell on an idea for implanting subdermal magnets to allow for even more elaborate attachments that he spoke with a friend who had a piece of steel trapped under his skin. The friend claimed this steel allowed him to sense magnetic fields when they tugged at the metal. Inspired, Haworth implanted tiny, powerful neodymium magnets in his fingertips and Jarrell's.

Haworth soon discovered that the fingertip magnets didn't just pull toward other magnets he encountered; its subtle vibrations actually let him "feel" the contours of magnetic fields surrounding electrical outlets, computers, refrigerators, and pretty much anything with a current running through it. When Wi-Fi routers started popping up everywhere, he could feel their signal, too. "We discovered a whole realm of possibilities and realities around the magnetic implants in the fingertips that we didn't know existed," he explained in a 2013 interview.

IMPLANTED CHIPS CONJURE A WORLD WHERE THE KEYS-WALLET-PHONE CHECK IS OBSOLETE, SINCE YOU'LL BE CARRYING ALL YOUR INFORMATION INSIDE YOUR HAND.

Pretty much all of grinding has been built on Haworth and Warwick's early experiments. Their willingness to turn their bodies into test sites has emboldened a legion of successive grinders to follow them. Implanted magnets and RFID chips remain the two most popular grinding projects, and most people in the scene have started with one or the other. (The fascinating anarcho-DIY grinder Lepht Anonym's first project was self-implanting an RFID chip using a vegetable peeler sterilized with vodka.) They also offer a relatively low-risk way for dilettantes like tech writers and startup bros looking for a hint of cyberpunk edginess to literally dip a fingertip into the scene.

* * *

RFIDs and magnets are also handy stand-ins for two diverging modes of thinking that are starting to emerge out of the grinding world, a place that's become unexpectedly populous in recent years.

On the one hand are practical biohackers, represented by implanters of RFIDs. Their approach prizes utility and functionality—enhancements that do stuff. RFIDs have proliferated since Warwick put one in his arm at the turn of the millennium, and implanting one (usually in a hand) is slowly becoming more useful. Now you can program them to do things like unlock your car, unlock your phone, and share virtual business cards. It's not a lot, but there are enough people who want them—even if it's mostly for the geek-schtick novelty factor—that entire companies are now mass-producing chip implants.

Haworth's magnets represent a different kind of motivation: the "whole realm of possibilities and realities" that he discovered at his fingertips. His spiritual descendants are as much artists as technologists, creating and installing enhancements that don't "do" anything other than expand the senses of users. An antenna that translates light frequencies to audio frequencies, allowing a colorblind artist to "hear" color. A gadget that gives you an awareness of magnetic north similar to that of birds. Implants that rumble whenever there's an earthquake anywhere on the planet.

Practical biohackers—and companies like Grindhouse Wetware, which makes a high-level chip implant with both Bluetooth capability and LEDs that light up through your skin—have instrumentality on their side. And by most traditional metrics, they're vastly more successful. When implanted tech finally breaks through to the mainstream, it'll probably be because you can actually start doing more with a chip in your hand than send GIFs to someone's phone (and not, say, because it suddenly became cool to always know which direction is north).

Practical grinders have created implantable earbuds that work through bone conduction. In Sweden, some offices already offer employees chip implants in lieu of keycards, and chip-equipped commuters can use their implant to pay for train tickets.

But the RFID model can feel oppressively mundane. It says a lot about our obsession with work and money, and how much of our identity hangs on them, that we're using the cutting edge of cybernetic science to literally incorporate them into our physical being. There's an acutely dystopian sensation to reading about a person implanting a chip in their hand and programming it to wirelessly share their LinkedIn profile, as a strategy director at an Australian media company did, or companies—even presumably well-meaning and charmingly Swedish ones—chipping their employees. There's something even more blandly sinister about the way employees enthusiastically went along with it.

Grinders on the artsier side of the discipline are pointing a different way forward—one that doesn't so strongly suggest a grimly beige nightmare future where we're all walking around with Microsoft Outlook delivering work emails directly into our brains. To people of a more utilitarian bent, the work of the artistic grinder can seem silly and unserious. For instance, the practical applications of an implant that senses earthquakes—vibrating every time one of the many seismic sensors scattered across the globe is jostled by the planet's ever-active crust—are extremely limited. They can't predict quakes or help you get to safety faster. All that Moon Ribas, the artist who conceived of this implant and had one inserted into her arm, will claim about her device is that it gives her a deeper connection to the Earth. Depending on your personal preferences, that may or may not seem worth having a foreign object inserted into your body.

* * *

BUT the impracticality of projects like Ribas's is what makes them art. There's a mystery at the center of her seismic implant that verges on magic. Superficially, there's the knotty question of why someone would go through the trouble of designing, manufacturing, and implanting a piece of technology with a single esoteric function. But on a deeper level, Ribas's ability to essentially invent a whole new sense for herself, one that nobody else on Earth has, seems half conceptual art piece, half sorcery. Ribas choreographs dances based on the seismic feed from her implant, and watching her move in sync with a collaborator that no one else but her can sense—seeing her commune with the planet on a level that literally none of us can imagine—is spooky and profound.

Nor does grinding of this more abstract kind lack real-world value. One of biohacking's great breakthroughs so far

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY ADAO

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is this realization that it's even *possible* to expand our senses in such a way. Biohackers have demonstrated that our brains have incredible flexibility when it comes to interpreting data the rest of our nervous system provides. Neil Harbisson, a colorblind artist with a sensor embedded in his skull that turns color into sound, said it took only a few months after getting his "eyeborg" attached before he stopped having to consciously translate the audio frequency into the color-wheel hue the sound represented. Before Ribas's seismic implant, she had a device that used sensors and a rumble pack to give her an experience of 360-degree spatial receptivity akin to what bats gain from echolocation. Her brain quickly learned to interpret the implant's vibrations, which magically enlarged her awareness in space.

These kinds of experiments open a door to a much different set of possibilities for future biohacking. Implanted chips conjure a world of convenience where the keys-wallet-phone check before you walk out the door is obsolete, since you'll be carrying all your information inside your hand. Ribas and Harbisson's work imagines one where freelance hackers design new ways of perceiving the world around us—not unlike the way hackers design novelty cryptocurrencies today. Harbisson's latest eyeborg upgrade lets him sense color outside the visible spectrum for humans, making him the first person to be able to "see" in ultraviolet and infrared without goggles or screens.

> **WITH WI-FI-CONNECTED PROCESSORS POPPING UP IN A BEWILDERING ARRAY OF CONSUMER GOODS, THE INTERNET OF THINGS IS SPREADING SO DEEPLY INTO OUR LIVES THAT IT MIGHT START MAKING SENSE TO BE ABLE TO CONNECT *YOUR OWN SELF* TO THE NETWORK, TOO.**

What grinders of all stripes agree on is that their fringe interest is going to go mainstream sooner or later, with the odds favoring sooner. Once big corporations decide to support RFID-style chip implants and make them useful for something beyond nerdy parlor tricks, they'll almost definitely attract a sizable user base, despite the inevitable Book of Revelation freak-outs from the Christian right and objections from anyone who might have reservations about giving Apple or Amazon or whomever rent-free space in their bodies.

It also seems likely that there will be some big sensory-expanding, implantable innovation that'll reshape our interior world the way the Walkman did in the eighties. Maybe the ability to sense magnetic fields, or some kind of induced sight-to-sound synesthesia like Neil Harbisson has, will be as commonplace as headphones.

And obviously people will invent ways to use cybernetics to get you off, just as with so many other technologies. It's almost certain that Utah grinder Rich Lee's Lovetron 9000, an implantable rumble pack that sits under the pubic bone and turns your penis into a vibrator, is only the tip of that iceberg.

Between the sense-expanding potential that implants have already shown, and the increasing amount of research into electronic interfaces for the brain, it doesn't take much imagination to picture someone eventually figuring out how to hack a way to get cybernetically high, too.

But it might turn out that we'll have to start upgrading ourselves just to keep up with the other technology we're so busy inventing. With Wi-Fi-connected processors popping up in a bewildering array of consumer goods, from refrigerators to sex toys, the Internet of Things is spreading so deeply into our lives that it might start making sense to be able to connect *your own self* to the network, too.

More importantly, there's a sense among biohackers that their work is part of the next step in the evolution of the human species. The comforts of modern life, like medicine and modern food production, shield us from most of the survival-of-the-fittest stresses that drive natural selection, so however Homo sapiens evolve from here on out is basically up to us. Biohacking is a way to put your hand on the wheel of human evolution. Nowhere in the biohacking movement is that clearer than in its latest and possibly most radical new wave: the quest to alter ourselves on the genetic level.

■■■

DIY gene editing may sound even more fantastical than implantable technology, and until very recently it was almost entirely theoretical. For all the advances over the past few decades, genetic engineering is still very much in its infancy.

Up until a few years ago, making even minor tweaks to an organism's genetic code took a lot of money, a lot of sophisticated lab gear, and a lot of trial and error. But in the past decade, geneticists have figured out how to use an ancient bacterial DNA sequence called CRISPR to edit genes in living organisms—even intricately coded humans—with an ease and accuracy that many scientists in the field never expected to be possible.

Now, for $159, you can buy a CRISPR editing kit that'll let you play around at home with the most powerful gene-editing tool ever conceived. Cheap CRISPR editing has taken the power to manipulate our genetic code out of the hands of big, slow-moving institutions bound by certain legal, ethical, and practical constraints, and put it in the hands of home-brew hackers who aren't afraid to dream big and recklessly.

They aren't afraid to experiment on themselves, either. While money and tech aren't the hurdles they once were to dabbling with the genetic code, getting results still takes a lot of experimenting, so some daredevil DIY geneticists have turned to self-testing CRISPR hacks. In 2017, a biohacker named Josiah Zayner injected himself with CRISPR-encoded DNA designed to build his muscles. Around the same time, Aaron Traywick, the self-taught CEO of a genetic therapy startup called Ascendance Biomedical, injected HIV-positive programmer Tristan Roberts with what he claimed was a CRISPR-based cure for HIV. A few months later, Traywick injected himself with another CRISPR-based genetic cocktail he said would cure him of herpes.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY HQUALITY

These experiments flamed out, and the men have stopped self-administering genetic "cures." Zayner failed to grow mega-muscles and has since emerged as a voice of caution in the biohacking scene, arguing that "people are going to get hurt" if they keep testing gene therapies in such a rodeo fashion. Roberts's viral load actually increased before he publically gave up on alternative HIV therapies. As for Traywick, his herpes cure didn't seem to work, and in spring 2018 he was found dead in a sensory-deprivation tank in Washington, D.C., the cause not a gene hack but drowning after taking the sedative ketamine.

Needless to say, injecting yourself with untested implants and gene-editing therapies is high-risk behavior, but as biohackers are quick to point out, the stakes as this revolutionary technology develops are also extremely high. Whether it's genetics or electronics, we're on the verge of a new level of technology capable of modifying and enhancing the human body and mind. How the power to do so is distributed will have massive societal implications.

Imagine if Apple puts all of the power of an iPhone in an implant but also keeps its restrictive user agreements? Or even easier, imagine that someone actually comes up with a way of genetically enhancing human health and intelligence but the global economic elite decide to keep it for themselves. Before his death, Stephen Hawking suggested that we might be heading toward a future where our species' next evolutionary step is reserved for the wealthy, resulting in two distinct human populations on two different evolutionary paths.

We also might have to hack ourselves to keep up with the artificial intelligence we're creating. From Alphabet/Google to Chinese mega-retailer Alibaba, most of the big global tech corporations are researching AI. With advances in processing power and machine learning, it's looking more and more like we're on the path toward an AI as smart as, or smarter than, humans.

WHETHER IT'S GENETICS OR ELECTRONICS, WE'RE ON THE VERGE OF A NEW LEVEL OF TECHNOLOGY CAPABLE OF MODIFYING AND ENHANCING THE HUMAN BODY AND MIND.

The sunniest outcome is that benevolent super-smart AI will help us untangle the knot of the extinction-level dangers humankind has created, from economic inequality and overcrowding to global environmental collapse. In this scenario, we might want an implant to give us a direct line from our brains to altruistic AI sages. Scientists and tech gurus have been looking to sci-fi for clues as to how that might play out. In his Culture novels, the late sci-fi writer Iain M. Banks imagined humans living in a post-scarcity utopia, communing with godlike AI through neural interfaces embedded in our brains. Elon Musk has borrowed from Banks's novels for his secretive startup, Neuralink, founded to research the possibility of brain/computer interfacing, or "neural lace," in real life.

■ ■ ■

MANY of the predictions surrounding AI have a darker, more apocalyptic edge. Super-smart AI might not value humans, in which case we'd need to supercharge our brains just to compete with it, or else risk the extinction of our species. Then again, maybe we'd embrace the idea of humans going extinct.

There's a large overlap between biohackers and transhumanists, who believe the next evolutionary step will involve erasing borders between ourselves and technology. Transhumanists predict a Singularity where we essentially become one with computers. That might mean uploading our minds to computers in some sort of digitized Rapture, or it might mean collaborating with AI to create a genetically enhanced, technologically upgraded species to replace Homo sapiens and usher in a new world where everything about people and our society is different, and hopefully better.

Out at its fringes, biohacking can start to resemble an end-time religious cult (although these days the same could be said for pretty much any community in this country organized around a common interest). People casually talk about the end of humankind as we know it, in blog posts with titles like, "On the inevitable extinction of the human species and the creation of the posthuman species." Things get so comic book-y and over the top that it's easy to ignore the fact that we might actually have to deal with the questions they raise.

Once we figure out how to put a computer in someone's head, will that person be more than human, or less? How much can you alter a person's genome before they become something different from Homo sapiens?

Humans have been speculating about such developments in science fiction and comics for so long that the idea they could turn out to be actual issues in our current lives is hard to fathom. It's like those movies where a beloved character from a children's cartoon manages to cross the membrane from fiction into reality—except here we have to wrestle with the possibility that humans as we know them might one day be obsolete.

We could be on that trajectory already. Even with all the stunts and self-surgery and doomsday predictions, biohackers aren't all that different from the rest of us. In fact, we've all become something like biohackers. If you were to watch a time-lapse movie of the evolution of personal computers over the past four decades, you'd see big beige boxes shrink down, smooth out, and finally make the leap from the desktop into our hands, where our smartphones now live. If you fast-forwarded the movie you might see the phone morph into a wristwatch, and then see that watch shrink down even further before it finally slides under the skin, completing a journey that was still strictly sci-fi just a few years ago.

We already live with computers stuck to our hands, and we've already transformed ourselves in huge ways because of them. Think about all the data in your head that only exists as shortcuts to where you can find more complete information on your phone—contact lists of numbers and email addresses, maps to places we should really remember how to locate without GPS, a Wikipedia-like world of knowledge at our fingertips to satiate our most trivial cravings for information. We aren't addicted to our phones simply because we're hooked on social media and the little serotonin kicks we get from internet likes—we need our phones because they provide access to parts of ourselves we've scattered throughout the cloud.

Whether we like it or not, we're all a little cyborg these days. If grinders seem strange to us, it's not because they're so alien—it's because they're so familiar, men and women who exist as a strange amalgam of person and machine, just a few steps further down a path we're already walking.

Miles Raymer is an artist and writer living in New York City.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY METAMORWORKS

CREATURES OF THE PAINT

Basketball's Tallest, Sometimes Gangliest, Often Limited Centers.

BY PHIL HANRAHAN

I'VE never stood beside a seven-footer. But twice in my life—once when I was a teenager, and once in grad school—I found myself looking up at six-foot-ten basketball centers, both of them now retired NBA players. Hall of Famer Bob Lanier was the first "big" I met, at a charity event in Milwaukee. Egyptian-born Alaa Abdelnaby, a Duke University star before getting drafted by the Portland Trail Blazers in 1990, was the second.

Meeting Lanier was like meeting a giant. I still remember his catcher's mitt-sized left hand (the Dobber, as he was nicknamed, was one of the greatest lefties to ever hit the hardwood). To raise money for charity, Lanier, then a Milwaukee Buck, had donated a pair of his size-22 white leather Converse sneakers. My dad bid on the autographed shoes, our bid won, and moments later I was shaking Lanier's hand. Lanier had the biggest feet the NBA had ever seen, and now a pair of his shoes sits in the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts. It's an exhibit. You can compare your shoe size to his.

Abdelnaby was one of nine Duke Blue Devils in a pickup game in Card Gym, adjacent Cameron, on a day before the season started, and I was the tenth player on the court. For a goof, he played point guard one game, and I remember being struck by his dexterity. He shot some threes, showed a good handle dribbling the perimeter, and delivered accurate passes into the post. He did this with a smile on his face. He was having fun.

Needless to say, there are ballers taller than Abdelnaby with handles and shooting skills far superior. Seven-footer Dirk Nowitzki comes to mind. As does seven-footer Karl-Anthony Towns, and seven-foot-three Kristaps Porzingis. These latter, younger bigs won the NBA All-Star Skills Challenge in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Husky Lithuanian Arvydas Sabonis, seven-three, knocked down a third of his NBA three-pointers. This November, Milwaukee Bucks center Brook Lopez, a hair over seven feet, drained an insane eight three-pointers against the Denver Nuggets. Video of his barrage went viral, and a nickname was born: Splash Mountain, a riff on the Steph Curry/Klay Thompson "Splash Brothers" moniker. The Magic Kingdom echo couldn't be more appropriate for Lopez, a self-described "Disney nerd" who owns a Disney-decorated home on the Disney resort property in Orlando.

And as far as big guys who can dribble, we might never see another six-eleven superstar with a seven-foot-five wingspan and size-18 shoe who can handle the rock (and do everything else) as well as Kevin Durant. And then there's Giannis Antetokounmpo, "The Greek Freak," who, at six-eleven, can *fly* down a basketball court, has a silky midrange game, and is so extraordinarily athletic, his former Bucks coach, Jason Kidd, turned Antetokounmpo into his primary ball-handler during the 2016-2017 season. Kidd, a Hall of Fame point guard, converted his lanky young superstar into a point-center.

Former Lakers point guard Magic Johnson is six-nine. Uncannily coordinated Ben Simmons, six-foot-ten, plays point for the Philadelphia 76ers.

And then there are tall guys who never develop a handle or an outside shot. Skyscrapers with limited skills. Professional beanpoles—guys who can clog up the lane, block shots, rebound, and not much else (sometimes they can't even rebound that well, being too rickety, earthbound, and slow). These are basketball centers so huge—in terms of body length—that they grab the eye camped in the paint even in the NBA.

If they make it to the NBA, that is. More than one guy standing seven-and-a-half-feet or thereabouts, with Association dreams, never did acquire enough of a hoops skill set, and/or was too frail, injury-prone, plodding, and lacking in stamina to get drafted.

I'm thinking of seven-foot-seven Kenny George, he of the size-26 custom Nikes, who played two seasons for UNC-Asheville. George was reportedly the tallest college basketball player ever. I'm thinking of Englishman Paul Sturgess, also seven-seven. He played in the NBA G League and for the Harlem Globetrotters, but never made the big show. I'm thinking of China's Sun Mingming, tallest of them all. Mingming is seven-foot-nine. He played one season for a community college in Ventura, California, and then spent several years playing professionally for teams in America, Mexico, and China, but never for an NBA team.

(You might remember Mingming from *Rush Hour 3*. There's a scene where he lifts Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker off the ground simultaneously, with help from a bamboo stick.)

No salute to on-court human sequoias would be complete without mention of the classic scene in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* where towering "Chief Bromden," played by Native American former rodeo star Will Sampson, is coached by Jack Nicholson's character, during a pickup game at an insane asylum, to simply stand beneath the basket and raise his arms. Asylum patients cheer when Chief gets a lob and drops the ball in the hoop.

And before we meet our four NBA beanpoles, let's check in with seven-foot-seven high-school baller Robert Bobroczkyi. Only 30 known human beings on planet Earth are taller than him. He's aiming for the NBA, but he's so skinny he resembles a stick figure in a hoops uniform. He runs in slow motion. He quickly gets exhausted. But he has a decent mid-range shot, he can pass, and he can play with his back to the basket. So who knows. Maybe before too long Bobroczkyi will follow in the huge footsteps of these four guys....

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY LEONARD ZHUKOVSKY
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY VERVERIDIS VASILIS

Kevin Durant

Giannis Antetokounmpo

Shawn Bradley

A seven-foot-six ectomorph, Bradley played 12 seasons in the NBA, and though he notched some impressive individual performances (multiple triple doubles, fueled by blocks, not assists), he never fulfilled the promise of his No. 2 draft position. Oft-injured, Bradley ended up scoring 8.1 points per game, with 6.3 rebounds in 23.5 average minutes.

Gheorghe Muresan

At seven-foot-seven, with an otherworldly wingspan of nearly eight feet, Muresan is as tall a player to ever lumber up and down an NBA court. In six injury-plagued seasons, four for the Bullets/Wizards, and two for the Nets, this Romanian, who costarred in the Billy Crystal movie *My Giant,* did best in 1995-96, averaging 14.5 points per game and 10 boards.

Manute Bol

This Sudanese center played on and off for four pro teams between 1985 and 1995, was as tall as Muresan, a lot skinnier, and blocked many more shots. Twice, he blocked eight shots *in one quarter*. He goes down as the only NBA player to have more career blocks than points. And that's despite the fact that he liked to launch the occasional three, once hitting six of 12 in a half. Bol could alter and erase shots, but otherwise struggled on defense.

Boban Marjanovic

The shaggy-haired, seven-foot-three Serbian, with a wingspan rivaling Muresan's, has become a fan favorite around the league, just as the late Bol had during his career. Bobi, as he is known, doesn't play a lot of minutes for the L.A. Clippers (his current team), but gets serenaded with cheers at the Staples Center whenever he checks in. He electrified social media in the Clippers' opening game this year by taking a pass in the paint and one-hand dunking *without jumping*. Briefly grabbing the rim while flat-footed, he damaged it and caused a delay. Bobi scored 18 points in 18 minutes that game. Be sure to look up the YouTube videos of Bobi being taught dance moves by his teammate Tobias Harris.

Magic Johnson

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY BRITTNEY WILLIAMS

JANUARY PET OF THE MONTH

INDIAN MOON

January Penthouse Pet of the Month Jisel Lynn has the kind of beauty all women want and all men wish they could tote on their arm. But Jisel isn't tamed that easily. Good luck getting this unicorn to give you a second glance. Hailing from Miami, Florida, this Indian-Puerto Rican beauty gave up the sunny, coconut-scented beach life for Eastern Canada, where she currently resides. Unsurprisingly, the snow looks just as good on Jisel, but we prefer her soaked in sunshine, so we brought her back to Southern California for the day.

Photography: Holly Randall

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FEBRUARY PET OF THE MONTH

SPEED RACER

February Penthouse Pet of the Month Anna Lisa Wagner nearly broke some guy's neck while we were shooting her next to this yellow Beamer on Route 66. She didn't tackle him down or anything (though we wouldn't put it past her), Anna Lisa just happened to take off her shirt as this guy's truck sped by, and the driver did a double-take so severe he nearly crashed into a concrete wall. Despite that near-fatal mishap, Anna Lisa pressed on as we followed her down America's Main Street, past a slew of desolate motels, dive bars, and truck stops. But don't worry, no other men were harmed in the making of this pictorial.

Photography: Suss Oldman

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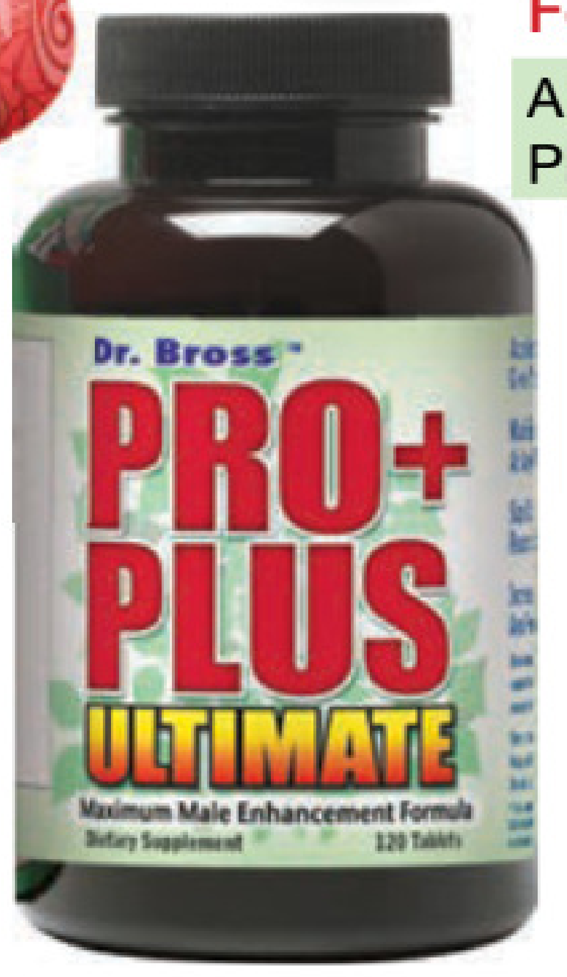

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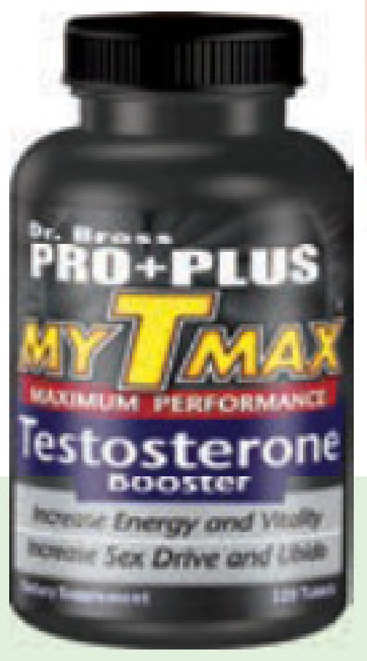

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V147

THE MAGIC PILL

For men, Propecia seemed like a dream come true—a gift from the hair gods. But then came the lawsuits, the horror stories, and the new research.

BY MITCHELL SUNDERLAND

ON a humid South Florida day, I sat waiting on a dermatologist's examination table, still sweating a little from my time outside. Running a hand through my dirty blond hair, I stared in the office mirror. Eighteen years old, horny, and gay, I was about to head off to college and was worried I'd never go all the way with a guy in school, or after. Physically, I had a lot going for me–green eyes, cute facial hair, height–but the distressing appearance of my forehead prevented me from considering any of these traits. I was going bald.

In the back of my mind, I'd always known this day would come. My father, uncles, grandfathers, cousins, second cousins, on and on–they all lost their hair in their twenties. Any time my mom got pissed, she reminded me of my fate: "One day you'll be bald, just like your frickin' father!" Although two baldies had impregnated my mom several times, and I grew up on a diet of pro-wrestling-era Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson–pop culture's strongest, manliest, baldest man–what I took from my mom's jab was that I would be ugly. I viewed hair loss the same way Urban Dictionary would one day define male baldness: "A guy with a receding hairline. Truly laughable yet sad at the same time."

To my teenage ears, my mom's diss meant I would die a virgin. I'd experienced blowjobs by this point, but who was going to let me pillage the tight, dark recesses of their body if my head resembled Dr. Evil's? I vowed to avoid this fate. A veterinarian my dad knew recommended a solution–Propecia, a medication that prevents, and in some cases, reverses balding. An eight-sided, orange-colored pill, Propecia, the vet said, had succeeded in saving his son's luxurious hair–a first in their clan of bald men. "It's a miracle drug," the animal doctor told my dad.

I decided Propecia would make me happy. When my doctor, bald himself, came into the room, I detailed my predicament, then said, "Give me Propecia!" The doc blinked.

"No, I will never prescribe that drug."

"But I want it."

"No, you don't. There's evidence it can cause permanent erectile dysfunction."

"But then I can just take Viagra, the blue pill."

"Research says it won't help."

"I could be totally bald by 25."

"I won't prescribe it."

I grimaced. Back then, there wasn't a lot of online information available, and nothing like today's impassioned user forums on Reddit and elsewhere. The stuff I'd looked at mostly just discussed the medical-breakthrough aspect of Propecia, and I hadn't run into the kind of dangerous stuff that crops up when you google the drug now. ("Merck stands behind the demonstrated safety and efficacy profile of Propecia, which has been prescribed to millions of men since its FDA approval in the U.S. in 1997," the company told NBC News in 2017, in defense of its product. It added, "Merck conducted well-designed clinical trials on the product and stands behind the results.")

But the fact that my doctor was against the drug gave me pause. I trusted him. He patted my shoulder and looked me in the eye: "Listen, you're eighteen. I know what you're worried about. But you'll be fine. Plus, what's the point of having hair if your dick doesn't work?" I pondered this, then concluded: *Yep, he's right.* I went on my merry way, and over the next decade, fucked loads of people.

■■■

AS much as "bald" can still sound like a diss, shiny-domed men have risen in contemporary cultural stature, and changed standards of male attractiveness. Baldy Jeff Bezos became the richest man alive. Dwayne Johnson jumped from wrestler to movie star, joining the ranks of Vin Diesel and Bruce Willis, while Michael Avenatti has assumed the mantle of thotty liberal avenger.

This fall, a story in the *Hollywood Reporter* was headlined: "Hollywood's New Power Move: Going 'Full Bald.'" On Instagram, women cry with joy over an account called DILFs at Disneyland, where the "dads they'd like to fuck," often bald, are shown pushing strollers through the Magic Kingdom. People have long cried "daddy" during sex. All sex goes back to the family, and lovers want to feel dominated, but society has only just come around to admitting we want to screw people who look like dads who could overpower us. All this has occurred while aging men with hair–Donald Trump, Kevin Spacey, Alec

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BACKGROUND IMAGE BY PAVEL KUBARKOV, ILLUSTRATION BY STUDIOSTOKS

Baldwin—have found themselves in trouble because of their behavior.

Despite scary reports of patient side effects, each year thousands of American men continue to turn to that orange pill as they begin their lifelong battle against baldness. One of its new users is a member of my extended family. At a recent holiday dinner, a relative around my age announced, “I'm taking Propecia.”

“Your dick won't work,” I said.

“But I need hair.”

His statement encapsulates the logic that explains why the drug remains popular, not only in America but around the world. Even our current president, according to his former personal physician, Dr. Harold Bornstein, was a Propecia user—and might still be. (The long-haired Bornstein spilled the beans to the *New York Times* in 2017, and two days later, he says, Trump's then bodyguard, a lawyer, and a third man raided his office and took possession of Trump's medical records; around the same time, Trump cut ties with Bornstein after 30-plus years.)

Not surprisingly, lawsuits—more than a thousand of them—have been filed against Merck on behalf of former Propecia users claiming damaged health, especially on the sexual front. This spring, Merck agreed to settle with a plaintiff committee of 562 cases, though terms remain confidential. (Merck has shelled out big money before; in 2007, it paid nearly $5 billion to settle lawsuits stemming from use of an arthritis drug, Vioxx, which doubled the risk of heart attacks and strokes.)

IT SEEMS TO COME DOWN TO ODDS, A RISK-REWARD CALCULATION. LET'S SAY THERE'S A SMALL CHANCE THE PILL WILL KILL YOUR SEX DRIVE AND TURN YOUR DICK INTO A NOODLE. DO YOU STILL GO FOR IT? IS YOUR HAIR THAT IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Head to Merck's product page for Propecia, and you'll find this: “The most common side effects of Propecia include: decrease in sex drive; trouble in getting or keeping an erection; a decrease in the amount of semen.” Meanwhile, over on Reddit, you'll find endless debate, with some Propecia users advocating for it based on their own happy experiences. You'll also find former users sharing horror stories.

It seems to come down to odds, a risk-reward calculation. Let's say there's a small chance the pill will kill your sex drive and turn your dick into a noodle. Do you still go for it? Is your hair that important to you? Based on some Reddit responses, there are guys who view follicles on the head as more virile than actual virility. Are they really choosing, as my dermatologist once put it, hair over their dicks?

* * *

HISTORY had prepared Propecia for a huge consumer base. Men have always battled baldness, and their fights have long been tied up in what men value most: sex.

Evolutionary biologists continue to develop theories concerning hair reduction on the human head and body, trying to pin down what advantages such states might have conferred. For example, as detailed in a 2003 *New York Times* story, a pair of English researchers proposed that humans lost their body hair as they evolved to remove furry habitats for parasites: disease-carrying lice, ticks, and fleas. And with prehistoric men perhaps drawn to less hairy women because they signaled greater health (fewer fleas), natural selection, powered by the male libido, led to women shedding more of their body hair over time than men.

The patriarch of evolutionary theory, Charles Darwin, would have supported this theory. “The absence of hair on the body,” he writes in *The Descent of Men,* “is to a certain extent a secondary sexual character; for in all parts of the world women are less hairy than men.” As for age-related balding, evolutionary biologists have proposed various theories.

In 1996, a pair of American researchers hypothesized that, while male facial hair signals sexual virility and aggressive dominance, male-pattern baldness may communicate social maturity, a non-threatening form of dominance associated with wisdom, nurturance, and elevated status. It may have created its own kind of attractiveness to women, while also conferring social-group advantages, earning chrome-domed males respect and security in the tribe.

Then there's the Turkish plastic surgeon, Dr. Emin Tuncay Ustuner, who turns to physics to explain the hair-loss process. As reported at the online site Science Daily in 2013, Ustaner points the finger at...*gravity*. Yup, he published a paper arguing that the weight of the scalp puts pressure on follicles at the top of the head, reducing their size over time. (Hair-follicle shrinkage is what makes us go bald; in fact, it's follicle sensitivity, an inherited trait, that makes some men more prone to losing hair.)

Why we do we get balder as we age? Because, Ustaner theorizes, in childhood our scalps have more fat under the skin, which buffers follicles from gravity's pressure. And since testosterone contributes to the thinning of subcutaneous fat, male sexual maturity factors in, too. His theory even helps explain why younger women don't go bald like so many younger men (myself included).

In women, the hormone estrogen prevents the thinning of scalp fat. With the reduction of estrogen during menopause, voilà, women start to experience hair loss. Dr. Ustaner even claims the weight of facial tissue adds pressure at the front of the scalp, while our ears help the scalp fight the effects of gravity. So that can explain horseshoe baldness.

While science has yet to fully understand the evolution of baldness, what is clear is that men for millennia have tried to fight this evolutionary trait as much as they have tried to avoid Death's knock on the door.

Ancient Greek physician Hippocrates advised balding men to rub pigeon shit on their heads. A little later, in Rome, Julius Caesar reportedly had a habit of standing in front of the mirror obsessing over his smooth bulb. According to the Roman writer Suetonius, Caesar wore that wreath of green leaves on his head—his laurels—to distract people's eye from his baldness.

In subsequent centuries, men turned to wigs and toupees to disguise their hairless pates. Nowadays, you can try covering your baldness with “hair systems,” you can shell out big bucks for follicular transplant surgery, you can rub Rogaine on your scalp (the active ingredient, minoxidil, is a vasodilator, which enhances blood flow to the follicles), and you can decide if the rewards of Propecia, which are real, outweigh the risks, also real.

Despite centuries of baldness-fighting strategies, cultural messaging about hair loss has not been monolithic. The story of men and their heads is not a simple tale of hair as hero and baldness as villain. In Greek mythology, Kairos, the god of opportunity, Zeus's youngest son, was depicted as bald up top with a single dramatic lock of hair dropping down from the front of his scalp. This shiny-headed divinity brought you good luck. Turn to the East and you'll find the Buddha, a sage who did not fight his baldness. Though many American presidents wore wigs, John Adams, John Quincy Adams, and Dwight Eisenhower all rocked bald spots.

Arguably, Hollywood typifies our complex cultural relationship to bald men best. Yes, Golden Age studio execs pushed toupees onto their male stars (extremely bald Yul Brynner, star of the *King and I* in 1956, was a rare exception), and contemporary comedies still traffic in bald jokes. On the other hand, baldies like Bruce Willis and the Rock have dodged bullets and climbed skyscrapers in multiple action films–movies that glorify robust masculinity as much as porn idolizes curvy, feminine women.

The same year Dr. Ustaner published his gravity theory, *GQ* posted a list called "The 100 Most Powerful Bald Men in the World." Names ran the gamut, from Michael Jordan, the Dalai Lama, and Jeff Bezos, to Verne Troyer, the two-foot-eight actor who played Mini Me in *Austin Powers and the Spy Who Shagged Me*. According to the BBC, academic psychologist Frank Muscarella, coauthor of the aforementioned study about baldness and social status, upon researching perceptions of bald men in 2004, found people judged them less attractive but more intelligent.

We both mock and respect bald men. We sort of love them, and we sort of hate them. But in the psychology of the average American male, disdain for baldness, especially when it comes to the possibility of losing one's *own* hair, is the clear-cut winner.

* * *

PHARMACEUTICAL giant Merck knew this when they began developing Propecia.

In 1974, an American endocrinologist, Dr. Julianne Imperato-McGinley, discovered that testicles and prostates transformed 10 percent of testosterone into *dihydrotestosterone,* or DHT. A year later, Merck researcher Roy Vagelos established that when DHT is emitted through many men's scalps, the chemical destroyed their hair. Everyone knows testosterone and its byproducts incite male rage, horniness, and frustration, but the hormone is also so strong, it can shrink hair follicles.

In a Freudian tragedy of sorts, a man's mother determines whether or not DHT destroys his hair, one of his biggest tools to attract sexual partners. If a woman's father went bald, so too would her son. Merck researchers later discovered that a chemical compound, finasteride, blocked DHT. They were searching for a drug that might shrink enlarged prostates, and finasteride, by defusing DHT, did the trick. (In 1992, the company debuted Proscar, its finasteride-based prostate medication.) But could finasteride, as DHT's enemy, also prevent male-pattern baldness? Yes, Merck discovered it could.

MSD
Propecia 1 mg
(finasteride, MSD)
For Oral Use
28 TABLETS

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY RAIHANA ASRAL

Like Indiana Jones finding the Ark of the Covenant, the company had stumbled upon something that had come to seem almost mythical: a drug that keeps dudes from going bald.

Merck gave finasteride a brand name, Propecia (they liked its rhyme with *felicia,* the Latin word for happy, as the Daily Beast has pointed out). They tested it, and conducted clinical trials. In 1997, the Federal Drug Administration approved Propecia. The drug went on the market, and men everywhere were happy. Simply by popping a pill, they could now keep their hair. The product wasn't snake-oil. It worked, and it was legal.

Merck began a massive marketing campaign. The chance for a windfall was high. In 2014, the BBC reported that men pay *$3.5 billion* worldwide on baldness remedies. Pharmacia Consumer Health Care, the maker of Rogaine, told ABC News that American men spend a billion a year to avoid going bald. As part of their online marketing, a Dollar Shave Club blog exploits male anxiety around baldness. The post cites research suggesting women perceived men with George Costanza-ish male-pattern baldness as "weaker," then it points out that women view *totally bald* men as confident. (Implication: Buy their razors and shave away that horseshoe of hair!) The post ends citing more research suggesting women prefer men with hair, and that's how they leave it: Not a real treat for men losing their hair.

Want to read more about hair loss and medical remedies from regular American men, instead of from researchers and corporate marketers? That's where Reddit comes in–Reddit, the zone where men can unleash their deep, repressed emotions concerning baldness, and write odes to Propecia, or slam it, behind anonymous avatars.

Of Merck's drug, one Reddit user sings, "PRAISE SCIENCE! Eight years ago I noticed I was losing hair. My boss commented on a 'thin spot' I didn't know I had. I was mortified. Baldness runs in my family, and I saw firsthand my older brother go through it in high school. I got on Propecia within the week. Six years later, and I still have my hair." This enthusiast includes photos of bald family members ("Here's my dad's head" says one caption; another says, "My younger brother when he was 22").

Adding a selfie showing a handsome, stubbled younger guy, this Propecia fan wraps his post by saying, "I sometimes model locally. This is my hair this month. The flash is to my right, which is between me and the camera, which would shine through my hair if it was super thin." After expressing understandable pride in his hair, he hits something of a defensive note, because he's conscious of the ongoing debate about "side effects."

For years, men were barely aware there was risk to pursuing Propecia's follicular reward. But over time, research began to appear. In 2008, the *Journal of Sexual Medicine* found that the rate of users of DHT-blockers reporting some kind of sexual dysfunction could be as high as 38 percent. Three years later, the journal claimed that 5 to 23 percent of users were reporting concerns, with half of these experiencing long-term problems.

In 2012, the FDA added "libido disorders, ejaculation disorders, and orgasm disorders that continued after discontinuation of the drug" to Propecia's side effects. And in 2015, a major, well-publicized study by Northwestern University researchers found that 4.5 percent of those using finasteride and dutasteride (the generic names for DHT inhibitors; the finasteride in Propecia is one-fifth the dosage prescribed to those with enlarged prostates) experienced short-term erectile dysfunction. The study also found that this dysfunction lasted, on average, for three and a half years after users got off the drug. Moreover, younger men, the researchers wrote in the journal *Peer,* seemed at greater risk. The risk also appeared to rise the longer the usage period.

"Our study shows men who take finasteride or dutasteride can get persistent erectile dysfunction, in which they will not be able to have normal erections for months or years after stopping," Dr. Steven Belknap, a Northwestern professor of dermatology and internal medicine, told NBC News. He expressed concern with Propecia's clinical trials and some follow-up studies, suggesting they don't accurately capture the risk. He also said despite the FDA's 2012 warning, doctors don't always detail the risks, especially for young men.

A San Diego-based doctor of sexual medicine, Irwin Goldstein, has built a cottage industry treating former Propecia patients battling erectile dysfunction and other issues. He told NBC News he'd treated men who'd lost their libido: "They see a woman, they say intellectually, 'I know I am supposed to be interested in you. But I am actually not interested in you.'"

The drug's reduction of testosterone byproduct DHT also appears to cause trouble for other hormonal systems, which can impact psychological health. Along with impotency, Dr. Goldstein sees men with "flat emotions" and related problems. According to the Daily Beast, Mikael Mikailian, a former Propecia user, experienced issues with his memory and sex drive. After three years on the orange pill, Mikailian forgot a woman's name on a date. Dr. Goldstein ended up giving him a drug used by women to produce testosterone, as his body was severely deficient. Goldstein told the Daily Beast he advises close to a hundred other men with similar problems.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY PAVEL GULEA

Goldstein's patients are not the only ones who may be experiencing issues that go beyond the sexual. Health Canada, the country's national health department, has been tracking a small number of cases with potential links between Propecia and suicidal thoughts (they concluded the matter needs more research, but issued a warning). Health Canada also pointed out that the World Health Organization database cites 170 men whose suicidal thoughts may have a link with finasteride use.

In 2016, Tonic shared the story of Eric Carlos Rodriguez, a 33-year-old Californian who committed suicide after developing depression. His family believes it was his use of Propecia that brought on the crisis. Today, nearly 17 percent of those belonging to the International Society of Hair Restoration Surgeons refuse to prescribe Propecia. Some doctors, when discussing the persistence of Propecia-linked side effects, speak of a "post-finasteride syndrome" (PFS).

On Reddit, you can find distressing personal accounts. In a post called, "IAmA male who took Propecia/Finasteride because I was balding...now I don't want to live," the user writes, "Seven years ago I was an 18-year-old athlete in top shape. I had scholarship offers to play basketball and football in college. Then I took a few pills of Propecia and one morning woke up and went to the restroom. Noticing that my penis felt like a limp noodle and I could barely urinate…. It sort of dribbled out and I couldn't push it out at all." Over time, this user relates, he experienced new side effects: no sex drive, muscle weakness, lethargy, brain fog, inability to focus, restlessness, anxiety, and testosterone levels below women's. "Basically made my entire endocrine system malfunctioned," he writes.

His post is not uncommon. "I did notice that I wasn't getting morning wood, or spontaneous erections, but I kind of dismissed it as having poor sleep, and I didn't make the connection," writes another guy. "When I got into a relationship, I was shocked to find I couldn't get hard enough for penetration." He compared his new sex life to "trying to shove an uncooked sausage into a hole." Four years ago he stopped taking Propecia, but his sex life remains horrible. He has not had morning wood, random boners, or full-mast erections when he jacks off. He said he's had a little success with Cialis, but none with Viagra.

Summing up the situations of the numerous patients Dr. Irwin Goldstein has treated, he said to NBC News, "Their only crime in life is to take an FDA-approved drug."

* * *

LIKE something out of a bad *Black Mirror* episode, men are continuing to swallow Propecia.

"Can anyone here convince me NOT to take finasteride?" writes one balding Redditor. "I'm not trying to start anything. I just want some honest attempts to keep me off the drug. If you argue against the drug, expect a rebuttal from me. If I fail to rebut any arguments made by those trying to keep me off of finasteride...then I won't take it. Anything below a .5 percent risk for permanent side effects is acceptable for me. At a rate this low, I think it's hard to even say for sure that the side effects are necessarily due to the drug."

Other Redditors jump in. "You should try it based on your stance," writes one. "For me, I tried it and noticed that my sex drive went down, my orgasms were weak...and my dick felt cold all the time, almost dead. I'm back to normal without taking it, so for me, the sides aren't worth it." And then this poster gets to the heart of the matter, asking: "What good is having hair and being good-looking if my dick can't be used?"

"Just try it, man," another guy on the thread writes. "The worst that can happen is you'll get a side and quit." In response to this viewpoint, a fourth Redditor says: "Messing with your hormones for cosmetic reasons is a poor idea."

Online, this kind of caution can be a minority view. When another poster describes his erection problems following six months on Propecia, he turned to propeciahelp.com/forum, he says. The very mention of this site roils some Reddit comrades.

"Dude, as someone who has gotten sides from finasteride and believes you 100%, I urge you: don't read propeciahelp," writes someone on the thread. "That forum is full of hypochondriacs and started to convince me, someone who doesn't even believe in PFS really, that I was going to have permanent side effects after quitting, and I willed them to be so for some time. I am almost a year off the drug now and I am 100% confident that I am back to normal, but I was really unsure for a while after quitting (felt very real sometimes).... Looking back I know it was in my head (the stuff I experienced after quitting, that is). All of these problems are super vulnerable to the power of suggestion."

The idea that it might be the mind causing (or suggesting the existence of) sexual dysfunction in some Propecia users, triggered by the warnings and the online debates, is in fact entertained by some doctors. And it's possible to find dermatologists who say they've been prescribing Propecia for years and their patients haven't had problems like those discussed here.

But what about the Redditor who says, while taking Propecia, he developed "man boobs" to the point where you could see his nipples poking through polo shirts?

His mind couldn't have caused that.

The lengthy online Reddit thread I've been quoting also features a guy who says he quit Propecia, went bald, and endured bald jokes. But it was worth it. "Got more women in the later half of my twenties when I went buzzed due to thinning than pre-hair loss," he writes. "So my advice, man, is embrace it. Not easy and it takes time but you will feel better."

■ ■ ■

THE Propecia saga goes like this. Men go bald. Men get sad because they associate hair with looking both masculine and hot. Men take a pill to grow hair. The medicine works. Men lose function in their dicks. They get depressed. They turn to Reddit. They vent. They stop taking the pill. They lose their hair (and may or may not regain their dicks), but still they search for it. Their main reason? Hair creates sex appeal. It's a circular story.

That same Reddit thread eventually turned to hairpieces. "I went to a place that gave me a lace system as my first for 600 dollars, cut and styled and glued," one guy writes, then adds a DIY note. "Learned what they do after two months and started doing it at home," he reveals.

It's a story, this Propecia saga, that weaves together so many fundamentals in life: sexuality, masculinity, physical appearance, aging, genetics, science, health, and the twists and turns of fate. What calculation would you make? If you're starting to lose your hair, what odds do you play? A .5 chance of trouble? One percent? Five? How important is your hair to you? How much of a gambler are you? This story is still being told.

Mitchell Sunderland was senior staff writer at VICE. He lives in Los Angeles, and his stories have been viewed by millions. He is at work on his debut nonfiction book, an investigation into the misunderstood pet industry, from a third-generation puppy person who was raised in the stockrooms of Florida pet stores and on the puppy farms of the Midwest.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM BY ILYA ANDRIYANOV

TITANS OF BALDNESS

By Mitchell Sunderland

WHETHER in Silicon Valley, Hollywood, or D.C., bald men are wrecking norms and reinventing America—and not always in a good way. Just like the gods of Greek mythology, these cueball-headed figures can use their powers for good or for ill. They can be heroes, these hairless men, or they can be villains. They are...the titans of baldness.

BALD TITAN OF HOLLYWOOD

Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson

Type of bald man: Muscular with smooth head, face, and chest.

Notoriety: In the waning days of movie stars, the former WWE wrestler is one of the few actors who can attract an audience on opening weekend, making *Jumanji* and *The Fast and the Furious* blockbusters.

BALD TITAN OF THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

Johnny Sins

Type of bald man: DILF

Notoriety: For every MILF, there is a DILF, and this well-endowed daddy has banged some of the most popular moms in town, all while rocking a man bod.

BALD TITAN OF SILICON VALLEY

Jeff Bezos

Type of bald man: Astronomically wealthy villain, like Lex Luthor if he spent his days union-busting instead of punching Superman.

Notoriety: A classic nerd when young, he has morphed into a clean-shaven, muscle-building vest wearer, all while growing Amazon into an unprofitable trillion-dollar business that causes trouble for labor unions, shuts down small businesses, and increases wage inequality. In other words, his imitator Lex Luthor style is perfect for him!

BALD TITAN OF RESISTANCE D.C.

Michael Avenatti

Type of bald man: Short, shiny-headed huckster.

Notoriety: In his many cable-news appearances, Stormy Daniels's famed lawyer charmed liberals with his blue-eyed baldness, but in the past few months, his questionable accusations against Brett Kavanaugh, grandiose public statements, and arrest for domestic violence (Avenatti denies the accusations) have made some consider him a typical bald-variety con artist.

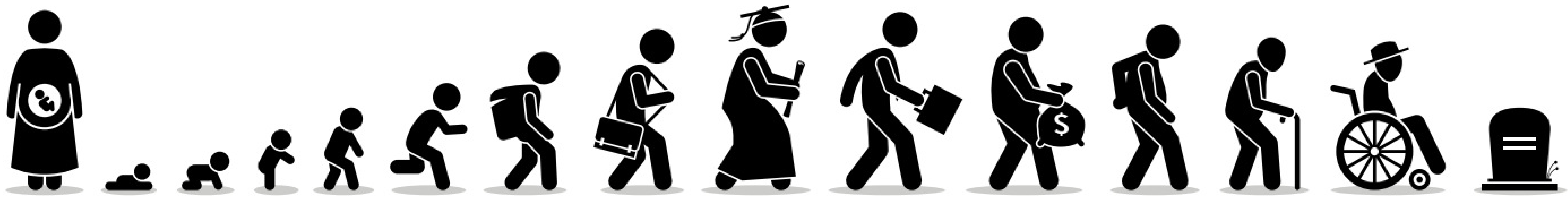
BALD TITAN OF RIGHT-WING D.C.

Stephen Miller

Type of bald man: The ugly kind, who refuses to shave the few remaining sprouts on his head.

Notoriety: This 33-year-old incarnates every negative stereotype about baldies. He's whiny, insecure, and delusional. A descendent of refugees, Miller has spent his time as a White House advisor trying to block asylum seekers from migrating to America, pushing racist rhetoric on cable news, and urging President Trump to build an unnecessary wall. Miller's so awful, his own uncle wrote an op-ed about how much he sucks. We hope Miller never shaves his hair, because his current ugliness reflects how nasty he is in his soul.

GROWING OLD



BY ALAN M. DERSHOWITZ

I JUST reached the age of 80. I still have growth in my life, but these days it can manifest itself in different and sometimes strange ways.

I'm sprouting hairs in places where nature never intended them to grow, while the hair on my head is thinning. My stomach has grown, while my height has diminished. My gums are growing, while my teeth are disappearing. My store of anecdotes is growing, while my memory of recent events is shrinking. My interest in working harder is growing, but my energy is waning. My visits to doctors are growing, but my life expectancy is diminishing.

Growth is not linear, but there are patterns. The key is to recognize the patterns and use them to your advantage. Age provides some advantages and strengths that we can exploit.

I remember, as a young adult, wanting very much to grow—in height, in strength, in intellectual capacity, and in success. I thought of growth as only moving in a positive direction. But now I realize that growth is multidimensional and multidirectional.

As a person who has been active all of my life and blessed with the energy to sustain my activities, I find it difficult to get used to the negative aspects of growth—of "growing" old. But as Churchill reminded us, growing old is better than its alternative. I see that alternative all around me as contemporaries die, while others become disabled. It's as if our expiration date—our "sell by"—has come and gone.

As an old man, I value every day. A friend of mine said that when you're 80, if you seem to wake up one morning and nothing hurts, it probably means you've passed on. Even pain, a companion to old age, can be a blessing. It reminds you that you're still alive and enduring the trials and tribulations of growing old.

Philip Roth once observed that growing old is not a battle—it's a massacre! Your reliable old body begins to turn against you. It's like a game of whack-a-mole where every time you cure one malady, another pops up. It is a never-ending battle whose ultimate ending is entirely foreseeable. There is darkness, not light, at the end of the tunnel.

I always seem to be waiting for test results from one doctor or another. My principle exercise is walking from one doctor to another. The trajectory is the opposite of what it was when we were young. "Growth" now means tumors, plaque, kidney stones, and bunions. No more growth of that kind, please!

I don't want to sound morose. I have lived a good life with no serious illnesses and look forward to more productive years. At least physically, I am happy with the status quo. But I know the status quo will not persist. Nor will my physical situation get better.

Now I want to grow emotionally. I treasure my relationships, with family and friends. I don't need the number of my friends to grow. I have enough. But I would like to see growth in the intimacy of my relationships. I no longer value ambition for ambition's sake. I don't need more successes or accomplishments. I don't have to prove anything. I don't have to answer every criticism, of which there are still many. I no longer keep score—except for my blood sugar and PSA numbers. Quality has become more important than quantity.

Change does not come easily to me. I still think of myself as a young man on the move—until I look in the mirror. I have to fight against long-honed competitive instincts. I find it hard to say no to new challenges and opportunities.

I'm trying, with the help of my wonderful wife, Carolyn, to be more in the moment—to go to matinees, to turn my cell phone off, to take long walks without particular destinations. My life with Carolyn continues to be a source of great pleasure and joy, and I'm excited to share more time with her.

My eternal optimism has not waned with age. So when I gaze toward the future, I do so with expectation. I look forward to enjoying my remaining years.

Alan M. Dershowitz is the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law Emeritus at Harvard Law School and author of "The Case Against Impeaching Trump." Follow him at @AlanDersh or on Facebook @AlanMDershowitz

HEADLINE ILLUSTRATION: SHUTTERSTOCK / BY LEREMY • PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY RUSLAN GUZOV

WHEELER WALKER JR.

INTERVIEW

COUNTRY MUSIC'S FILTHIEST STAR

Wheeler Walker Jr. on his new album, his Twitter beefs, and why he won't clean up his act.

BY WILLIAM LEE

I'M outside Brent's Deli in Northridge, California, waiting for the king of outlaw country music, Wheeler Walker Jr., who's on the cusp of launching his third album, *WWIII*. He's due to arrive on his own, without a posse, a lady friend, or an assistant. And though I'm aware that without comedian Ben Hoffman there would be no Wheeler Walker Jr.–the Nashville musician is Hoffman's invented persona–I'm hoping the guy who shows up is 100 percent Walker, zero percent Hoffman.

Rolling Stone has called Wheeler Walker Jr.'s music "unfathomably obscene," "undeniably offensive," and "goddamn funny." This foul-mouthed, sex-obsessed, pot-smoking hit-maker released his first record, *Redneck Shit,* in 2016. Following a buzz-building premiere via stream on Pornhub, the album debuted at No. 9 on the *Billboard* Top Country chart. You could even call Walker a crossover artist, considering that *Redneck Shit* also went to No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Top Comedy chart.

On this November day, Walker's fresh off opening for Kid Rock on his 15-date Red Blooded Rock N Roll Redneck Extravaganza tour. He's spent much of the last three years on the road, including during his own 20-city Eatin' Pussy/Kickin' Ass tour*,* and last summer's Dragon Energy gigs.

Minutes after taking up my post outside Brent's, Walker arrives. Granted, the man didn't roar up in a lifted pickup with a joint in his mouth and a girl on his arm, but the bearded Kentuckian who climbs out of a rented SUV in boots and jeans, black shirt, shades, and a black Adidas cap is indeed Wheeler Walker Jr. No sign of Hoffman.

Walker's made a career out of songs with titles like "Fuck You Bitch," "Which One O' You Queers Gonna Suck My Dick?," and "Drunk Sluts." Sex and getting high are central themes. His tune "Summers in Kentucky" lulls you with its beautiful melody and nostalgic, teen-love lyrics, then becomes X-rated. "Puss in Boots" is a rollicking good time, musically, while talking about blowjobs, fake breasts, and pubic hair.

WWIII picks up right where Walker's last album, *Ol' Wheeler,* left off. The record's first two tracks are called "Save Some Titty Milk For Me" and "I Like

PHOTO CREDITS: GERALD ACUNA
LIVE IMAGES COURTESY OF ROGERS AND COWAN

Wheeler Walker Jr. outside Brent's Deli.

Smoking Pot (A Lot)." Fourth on the album is "Fuck You With the Lights On," a tune Walker wrote for his wife Christine, a woman he loves so much he keeps the lights on when they do it.

When he's not writing dirty, druggy songs, or delivering them onstage, Walker likes to lob Twitter bombs at big-name targets. A typical day might see him going after Kanye West or having fun with a Donald Trump tweet. But Walker reserves his greatest ire for what he calls "fake country." Carrying a torch for George Jones-style roots music, Walker has engaged in one-sided online feuds with country duo Florida Georgia Line, Bebe Rexha (the platinum blonde singer who collaborated with FGL), and even Mason Ramsey, the kid who shot to fame when video of him yodeling a Hank Williams song in a Walmart went viral. The video propelled the then 11-year-old to a major-label record deal and an *Ellen* appearance.

A typical Wheeler Walker Jr. tweet? At November's start, the musician plugged his new album by typing individual words in a very long column, one atop another, in which he also unloaded on Ramsey, whose first single had cracked the *Billboard* Hot 100 in May.

Walker tweeted: "Please Buy My New Album When It Is Out On November 30th And Help Kill Pop County [sic] Dead." He added, "Fuck Yodel Kid Fuck Yodel Kid Fuck That Little Shit."

When asked about the tweet, Walker doubles down: "People are like, 'You're just jealous.' And I'm like, 'Yeah, no shit, that's the whole point. That little yodel kid took off. Like, fuck him. I don't wanna be outsold by some little kid. He ain't even that good."

> "THESE ARE VULGAR TIMES, MAN. YOU GOTTA USE VULGAR WORDS TO GET YOUR TRUTH ACROSS. AND PEOPLE AREN'T TELLING THE TRUTH 'CAUSE THEY'RE SCARED THAT THE TRUTH'S GONNA GET 'EM IN TROUBLE."

After settling into our green vinyl booth, Walker takes off his shades, revealing thoughtful brown eyes, but quickly pops the glasses back on when a photographer approaches.

"I just don't like taking pictures without my shades," he tells me.

Walker speaks low, so I have to lean forward to hear him, even in a quarter-full deli. In person, the musician has more shadings than the online version, a righteous Kentuckian battling for the soul of twenty-first-century country music. He's unfiltered in his speech, with a propensity to ramble, but his manner is polite. "He's an all right fucker," says a guy Walker tells me is his dad, Wheeler Walker Sr., when we speak by phone.

* * *

I'M a little surprised when Walker orders matzo ball soup, bagel chips, and seltzer water, but then again, we're in a deli. Walker tells me he was sober for a while, but now he drinks on occasion, along with smoking lots of pot. As he sips his seltzer, I ask him about the title to *WWIII,* an 11-song release which has him making slick music videos, doing press, and getting ready to go out on the road again, solo this time.

"It's called that 'cause my son's Wheeler Walker the third," Walker tells me. "Everyone thinks it's about World War III, but it's not, 'cause World War III ain't happened yet. Then again, with the country community so pissed at me, when this album comes out, it's gonna be World War III probably."

Walker explains that many of his fellow country professionals are upset with him because of the crude language in his songs. He points out that his records do better than a lot of the musicians who are pissed at him. And that's despite the fact that radio stations can't or won't play his songs, given their raunchy, drug-celebrating content. I ask Walker if he'd ever clean up his lyrics to get more airplay. No sir, Walker responds.

"I'd rather do what I want to do and see if it hits or not," he tells me. "When I listen to other people's music, I can hear them trying to sell records. Selling records ain't my goal. I got something to say. And music, country music, is the best way I know how to express what I want to say."

As Walker turns to his soup, I entertain the idea of asking him about Ben Hoffman, who just sold an animated series to Netflix, but before I get a chance, Walker gets on a roll about authenticity and self-expression, his voice charged with a quiet fire.

"People used to call country music three chords and a truth," Walker says. "And I used to love it, but I didn't hear anything close to the truth on the radio. I came to realize that for a musician to tell the truth…I mean, these are vulgar times, man. You gotta use vulgar words to get your truth across. And people aren't telling the truth 'cause they're scared that the truth's gonna get 'em in trouble. Nowadays with politics, all these big country guys–I know 'em and they're all liberal dudes–but they won't talk about it, 'cause it's gonna hurt record sales. I'm not saying you have to write political songs, but they're trying to be someone they're not to sell records. It's like, be who you are. These people, they're made-up personas. They're just not real. People are looking for real stuff."

The list of country bands and artists that offend Walker's sensibilities is long.

"Florida Georgia Line," he begins. "When you listen to country radio, it's just a big blur of all this shit. I don't know all their names. There's this duo, Dan and Shay, that's horrible. There's this guy, Chase Rice, he's fucking shit. Luke Bryan is really bad. Just everyone. Keith Urban is horrible. He used to play something closer to country music, but he's from Australia, so what's that mean? I don't know how brain-dead you have to be to put a Keith Urban album on and have any kind of enjoyment from that. It's just dog shit. Maybe everyone in the audience has brain damage, I don't know. Or CTE. What the football players have."

When prompted, however, Walker does name some country musicians he likes.

"Chris Stapleton's really good. I like him. This guy, Tyler Childers–he's great. Sturgill Simpson. He's the guy who introduced me to my producer. He's amazing. There's not a lot, really. Jason Isbell. I don't know if he's country or not, but he's great. He's a Nashville artist, certainly. I call him country 'cause I like to claim him as country. John Prine is still around, doing great stuff. Billy Joe Shaver. He's still alive and kicking ass. Getting to meet him, that was a highlight. Billy Joe being a fan meant a lot to me."

Walker's love of country music began during his Kentucky childhood. Wheeler Walker Sr. says his son started writing songs as a kid. "There was one about the neighbor's maid," his dad tells me by phone. "Nice lady, too. Thank God her grasp of language wasn't incredible. She would have been completely offended. All this stuff's now a gray area in light of our current... you know, how things are today. But yeah, Walker sang a bunch of real dirty songs from the get-go."

Three decades after penning that song about the neighbor's maid, Wheeler Walker Jr. found himself in a Nashville studio, recording *Redneck Shit,* an effort destined for surprise success.

"Honestly, I didn't know if I was gonna release it," Walker

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PHOTO CREDITS: GERALD ACUNA

says. "Then it started getting a following around town. People were passing it around. Like, if everyone's passing it around, why don't I pass it around for ten bucks a pop? So I put it out myself and...I mean, we sold 125,000 of 'em."

Listeners loved the dirty, party-loving lyrics. But Walker's fans are quick to point out that when he goes into the studio, he comes out with an honest-to-God country music record, with songs full of great melodies and twangy hooks. "*Redneck Shit* is far from just an X-rated novelty record," hailed *Rolling Stone* in 2016. Walker's fans include rapper Killer Mike, of Run the Jewels, and the aforementioned country star Tyler Childers. And then there's Kid Rock. The former Michigan senatorial hopeful asked Walker to tour with him in 2018. After working out the scheduling, Walker was all-in.

"I was like, anyone who's got the balls to take me out on tour, put me in front of his audience, well, that said something," Walker tells me. "It was weird. I'd look out and see little kids and stuff. I'd get nervous that they're hearing my songs—the adult content, you know—then I'd be like, 'Wait, they're seeing Kid Rock. They shouldn't be at this show anyway, so fuck 'em.'"

> "CHRISTINE WILL SAY, 'HONEY, COULD YOU DO THE DISHES?' AND I'LL SAY, 'I'LL DO 'EM FOR ANAL.' AND I JUST GO TO MY OFFICE AND WRITE A SONG CALLED 'ANAL & THE DISHES.'"

Joining Kid Rock's Redneck tour was the first time Walker had opened for anyone. If you're familiar with Walker's work, it's pretty obvious why. There aren't many artists who can gracefully follow a guy singing songs like "Better Off Beatin' Off," "Sit On My Face," and "Finger Up My Butt." Not to mention the ballad "If My Dick Is Up, Why Am I Down?"

WWIII features another first. On it, Walker introduces his family, such as it is, to the wider world. In addition to his son Wheeler Walker III, there's also his wife, a zaftig blonde who loves her husband's music above all else (she's played by Instagram personality Trailer Trash Tammy, who is herself played by actress and comedian Chelcie Lynn). Walker says *WWIII* is a love album. He also calls it his "most personal" record.

"It's kind of an R-rated version of my home life," the musician explains. "One song's called 'Anal & the Dishes.' That's my life now. Like, Christine will say, 'Honey, could you do the dishes?' And I'll say, 'I'll do 'em for anal.' And I just go to my office and write a song called 'Anal & the Dishes.' It's just like a crazy version of what my home life is. Obviously mine's different than most people's. Or maybe it's not that different. It's just I'm looking at it through a different lens. Other musicians might not go and write a song about it."

Walker says he has no plans to stop tweaking mainstream country music. One of his favorite tactics is to write about gay sex. When I ask him about the song "Which One O' You Queers Gonna Suck My Dick?" he leans forward, conscious of the guy in the booth behind us.

"I wonder if this guy's freaking out," Walker says. "For some reason this stuff pisses off the country community more than anything. So I'm gonna sing about it. I ain't gonna say whether or not I do this stuff, but I want them to think I do because it pisses 'em off. To pretend gay people don't exist in show business is just idiotic. Like I said, this stuff pisses 'em off the most, so for that reason every album will have this material on it. It's really my two favorite things—making music and annoying people. It's kind of what I do."

Walker says that dragging people on Twitter helps relieve the stress he experiences at home, as a husband and father. As he puts it, "If I get mad at this or that, when I'm off the road back in Nashville, instead of yelling at my wife or kid, I just go to my office, get on my phone, or fire up my laptop, and rip on a bunch of country artists. Stir things up. Get some attention. I'm just yelling into the void, really."

And with that Walker rises from our booth, thanks me for my time, and heads for the exit, boot heels thumping across the floor.

By the time you read this, Wheeler Walker Jr. will have strummed his guitar and sang his licentious, rowdy songs in another dozen or so major American cities, including Nashville, in support of *WWIII*. He'll have taken more flak for his lyrics, watched his latest music videos rack up clicks, and without a doubt caused more trouble on Twitter, busting on celebrities and badmouthing country peers. But really, it's all in good fun.

Like his dad, Walker Wheeler Sr., says, "He's an all right fucker."

William Lee is a writer from Chicago, Illinois.

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THE GIRL NEXT DOOR

BY JENNY NORDBAK

WHEN I was working at an L.A. dungeon, I had a neighbor named Maggie in the apartment building where I lived. She had graduated college a few years ahead of me, and was now a grad student. The mailman always mixed up our packages, so we made polite conversation in the mailroom, but nothing beyond the superficial. Maggie was sexy in an understated, nerdy way with big brown eyes and perky tits that she hid under loose sweaters.

Late one night, I was coming back from a play party in full fetish gear: a black latex mini dress that may as well have been painted on, thigh-high boots, and a bag full of implements. I was with two female submissives, both wearing long black trench coats and collars. Maggie arrived home at almost the same time, so she caught up with us as I unlocked the building's front door. I watched her eyes travel the length of my outfit and pause on the crops and canes that stuck out of my bag. Then she took in the two attractive women with me.

"Costume party?" she asked with a nervous laugh.

"Something like that," I answered.

I offered Maggie a teasing smile, and one of my subs gave her a saucy wink. I made a mental note to punish her once we got inside. Brazenly flirting with my neighbors was definitely not fair game.

We headed to our respective apartments, and a short time later the sound of Maggie's TV came through the wall before my companions and I started playing music with a heavy bass–all the better to drown out moans of pleasure and pain.

> **IT WAS HOT TO WATCH MAGGIE WITH MY SUBMISSIVES, KNOWING SHE WAS FEELING THAT UNMISTAKABLE, GLORIOUS SOFTNESS OF KISSING ANOTHER WOMAN FOR THE FIRST TIME.**

I forgot all about bumping into Maggie as I started to play with my subs. I had held back at the play party, but here I could indulge whatever fantasies I wanted.

I was still mostly clothed, sitting on the edge of a chair and letting them take turns going down on me, when I heard someone knocking on my front door. I shooed my naked subs to the bedroom and pulled my dress back down before peering through the peephole. There stood Maggie, bottle of wine in hand, wearing sweatpants and one of those baggy sweaters that drove me wild. She looked so delightfully innocent. What was she doing knocking on my door after midnight when she knew I had company?

I opened the door with a small smile.

"Um, any chance I can join you guys?" she blurted. "I'm not really sure how this works…but I brought wine."

Chuckling as I let her in, I said, "Why don't you go open the bottle in the kitchen, take a few swigs, and join us in the bedroom?"

When she reappeared, the three of us were sprawled on the bed, though not doing anything beyond a little sensual rubbing.

"What are you curious about, Maggie?" I asked. "BDSM? Women? Pain? Bondage? What brought you over here?"

It was fucked up to immediately put her on the spot, but I couldn't think of another way of making sure we didn't head down a road she didn't want.

"All of it," she answered quietly. "And you. I'm curious about my feelings for you."

I huffed a laugh and beckoned her over.

"How about we start slow and not worry about any BDSM or limits right now? What if we just make you feel good? Reward you for having the guts to come over here?"

She grinned and nodded, hopping onto the bed. There were a few awkward moments as we folded her into our tangle of soft-skinned arms and legs, but then the momentum of lust took over once again.

Maggie kissed me, moaning as our tongues met and I slid my hands under that loose sweater.

"I knew you weren't wearing bras under them," I chuckled against her lips, rolling her nipples between my fingers. I pinched them gently, loving the way it made her breath catch.

"I've never been with a woman," she whispered, sounding self-conscious.

"Well, lucky you–three for the price of one on your first go!"

At that, she turned and kissed my subs as well, first one then the other, matching their unique kissing styles. It was hot to watch her with them, knowing she was feeling that unmistakable, glorious softness of kissing another woman for the first time.

One of them eventually went to pull Maggie's pants off, but I stopped her.

"I want Maggie to do it. I want to know that you really want this, that you chose it."

She looked me in the eye as she slowly stripped her sweatpants down to her ankles and stepped out of them. And they say consent isn't sexy….

I groaned in delight when I saw her white cotton panties. Paired with her huge sweater, it was too delicious to handle, so I pounced on her, slipping my hand into that innocent underwear.

I'm pretty sure I have a fetish for white cotton panties. Same for naughty girls with soaking wet pussies hidden inside of them, which is what I found when my fingers reached Maggie's plump lips. They parted easily as the slick proof of her arousal coated my fingertips. She almost seemed too wet for the few minutes of foreplay that had happened.

"Were you touching yourself at your place, wondering what we were doing over here?" I asked as I began rubbing her clit in lazy circles.

She gasped, but didn't answer me, so I pulled my fingers away.

She moaned in protest, and said, "Yes! Yes, I was touching myself thinking about what you might be doing over here."

"Did you come?"

I thrust my fingers inside her as I asked the question. She didn't try to avoid answering this time.

"No. I was close, but held back."

"Are you close now?" I asked, rubbing her clit faster and thrusting harder.

"Yes," she moaned, more plea than answer.

"Good," I murmured, kissing her again as I brought her to her first climax with my fingers.

She melted back against the pillows a moment later. All the nervous tension had left her in an instant.

"Ready for more?"

"There's more?" she asked with a delighted giggle.

"Ladies," I said, inviting my subs with a nod of my head. They knew what to do. They went back to what we'd been engaged in when Maggie knocked on the door, only now she was the object of their attention.

They took turns licking Maggie's pussy, switching places every time they made her come.

When we had all lost track of how many times she'd gotten off, and she was lying limp and satiated, Maggie looked up at me and asked, "Does this make me a lesbian?"

I could only laugh.

"I'm not sure it *makes* you a lesbian…but we could always keep experimenting and find out," I offered.

She nodded eagerly, and pulled me down for a kiss.

"On one condition," I added. "You keep wearing the sweaters and that underwear. I can't fuckin' resist those white cotton panties."

Jenny Nordbak is a retired dominatrix and author of "The Scarlett Letters: My Secret Year of Men in an L.A. Dungeon."

CYBERCUTIE

SWEATER WEATHER

Our winter CyberCutie, Maria Antonella, recently relocated from Miami to the West Coast, and we scooped her up the minute we saw her. Who wouldn't be captivated by this stunning, curvaceous Venezuelan? One part Sophia Loren, one part Patricia Velásquez, two parts Russ Meyer vixen, Maria has that classic vintage beauty we just couldn't ignore, so we went full-on retro for our pictorial. "Working with *Penthouse* is such a fantastic start to my career in the adult industry," she beamed. Voluptuous, sexy, and sweet, we were more than happy to have Maria as our first CyberCutie of 2019.

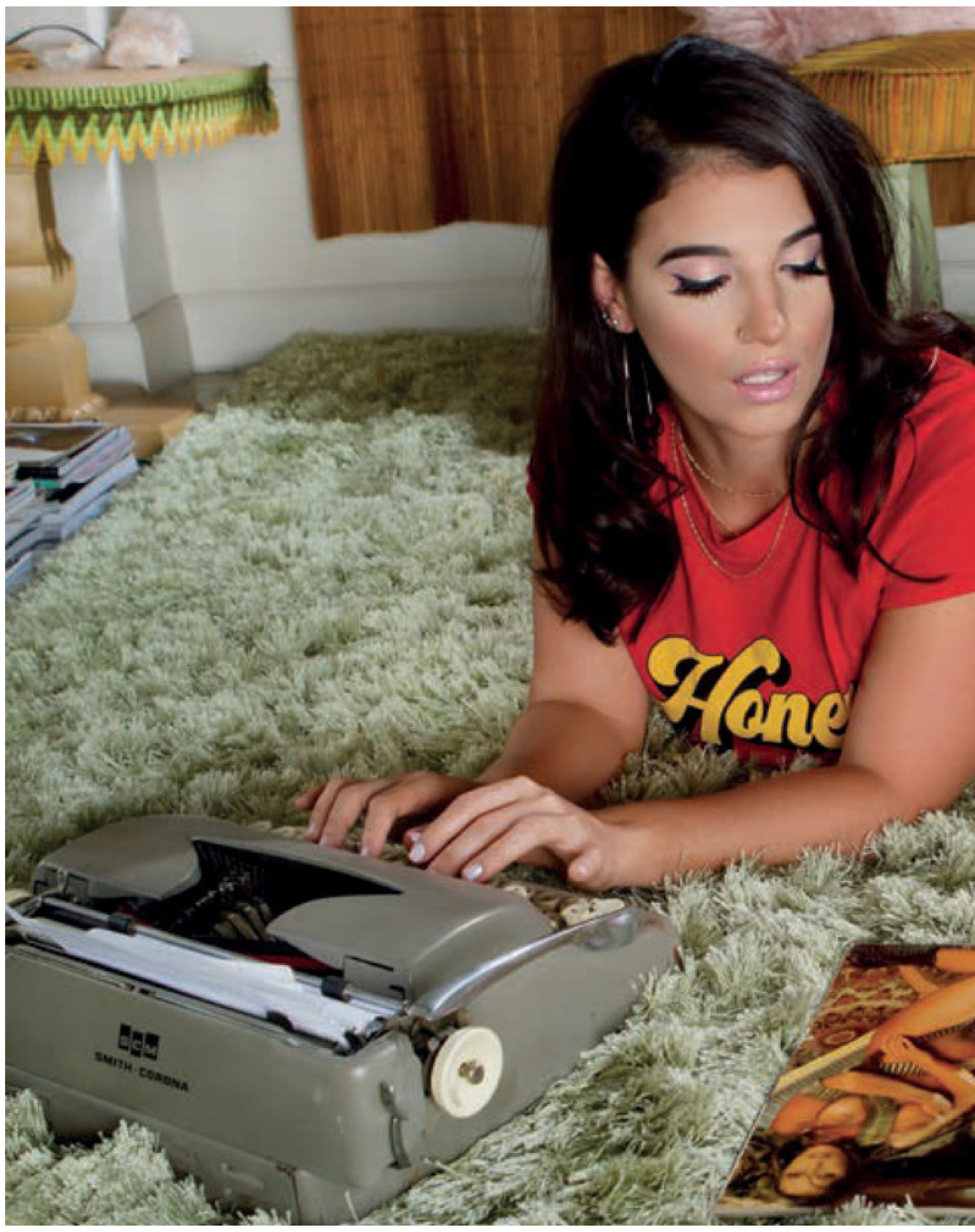
Photography: Gerald de Behr

FEELINGS

FEELINGS

FEELINGS

Honey
NGS


Hone
SMITH-CORONA

Hair & Makeup: Renee Parry • Styling & Wardrobe: Mish Barber-Way • Lighting: Jay Mourad

MARIA ANTONELLA

Vital Stats:
36D-29-36
5'3"
28 years old

What do you miss most about Venezuela?

I miss the food the most. So much.

What are three things you can't live without?

Sex, vibrators, and the internet!

What attracted you to the webcam world?

I liked [that] I was able to be my own boss. I love everything about nude photography, nude videos, and the adult industry. It's fascinating to me.

We hear you're a fan of feminist pornographer Erika Lust's movies. How come?

I found Erika on YouTube. I love her work because, unlike other porn, the woman is not a sex object, she is the subject. She is empowered.

What is your favorite romantic movie of all time?

Love by Gaspar Noé.

You recently lost a lot of weight. What motivated you?

I lost a lot of weight about five or six years ago. I wanted to better myself and be happy, and to live a healthy life.

Find more of Maria at https://share.myfreecams.com/Antonella699 or see more at Penthouse.com

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY PHET THAI

IRON SHARPENS IRON

Combat kills and destroys. Can it also shape some soldiers for the better?

BY MATT GALLAGHER

ONE of the more enduring portraits of the modern military veteran is a soldier afflicted with post-traumatic stress disorder. A few different versions exist—there's the angry, crazed vet (think Robert De Niro's ex-Marine Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver,* and Sylvester Stallone's Rambo), and the outcast, woebegone ex-soldier (like Gary Sinise's alcoholic Lieutenant Dan in *Forrest Gump*). Vietnam-era caricatures, all.

The fact that PTSD is something that plagues many people at some point in their lives—car-crash survivors, victims of violent crime, men and women who abruptly lose a loved one—gets lost amid the power of an entrenched narrative. "Veteran" and PTSD go together in our culture like sunglasses and a hangover, and—much to my eternal chagrin—no amount of Embrace the Suck columns will change that.

This isn't to dismiss PTSD, or ignore the fact that some of its effects do impact the veterans community at alarming rates. (Vets make up roughly 20 percent of America's homeless population—one index of war's psychological aftermath for many.) But it's a phenomenon that has already been examined from multiple angles and perspectives. Let's spend this month looking into another side of post-traumatic stress—a beneficial change in psyche that sometimes results from adversity like military combat. Psychologists have a name for this transformation; they call it "post-traumatic growth."

According to a *Military Times* op-ed written by retired Army psychologist Bret Moore, the term *post-traumatic growth* refers to "the theoretical model and science that explores how people who endure psychological struggle following adversity can often achieve positive growth afterwards." Sounds nice, but what does that look like? Elaborating, Moore describes "a greater appreciation of life, increased personal strength, openness to new possibilities, improved relationships, and enhanced spiritual or existential awareness."

Think post-traumatic growth is just head-shrink nonsense? Guess again. The current Secretary of Defense, retired Marine

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / BY PRESSLAB

HOW DOES A HUMVEE DRIVER DWELL ON THE PIECE OF HIGHWAY TRASH THAT ENDED UP BECOMING A ROADSIDE BOMB WHILE THE GUNNER WHO NEVER SAW IT ONLY CONSIDERS THE WAY THE SUN WAS GLINTING WHEN THEIR HUMVEE GOT HIT? WHY IS ONE SOLDIER'S TRIUMPH ANOTHER'S BURDEN?

general and perennial camo cult hero Jim Mattis, has talked extensively about post-traumatic growth in his own life, and about how the crucible of combat can lead to young people emerging from it who "actually feel kinder toward [their] fellow man and fellow woman."

In a celebrated speech he gave in 2015 at the Marines' Memorial Club in San Francisco, Mattis expanded on that idea. "For whatever trauma came with service in tough circumstances," he said, "we should take what we learned...and like past generations coming home, bring our sharpened strengths to bear, bring our attitude of gratitude to bear. And most important, we should deny cynicism a role in our view of the world."

It doesn't have to happen on a big epiphany level, either. I joined the Army as a liberal arts major who couldn't change a fucking car tire. A few years and a formative combat tour later, I'd become a man who valued competency in a human being above all else. I was handy with weapons. I trusted my decision-making and didn't let small things (fantasy football aside) rattle me anymore because, hey, Iraqi militants weren't shooting at me and my friends, so all was well. And a car tire? Hell, I'd changed the treads on an Abrams tank! Is all that post-traumatic growth? I wouldn't have called it that before I started the research for this article. But in a way, at least some of it? Yeah, I guess so.

Some caveats: Just as veterans aren't a monolithic community, there's no such thing as a monolithic veterans' experience, either. An identical experience in combat (or anywhere) could serve as a growth opportunity for one person, while the person standing right next to them struggles with this pivotal moment for decades. Researchers who study combat's effects on the human brain readily admit they've only just begun to understand how factors like upbringing, prior encounters with trauma, and personal coping techniques impact what becomes post-traumatic stress.

How does a firefight get remembered by one infantryman as the central ordeal of his life, while the soldier who was next to him later enjoys regaling his children with stories of it as the great adventure of his youth? How does a Humvee driver dwell on the piece of highway trash that ended up becoming a roadside bomb while the gunner who never saw it only considers the way the sun was glinting when their Humvee got hit? Why is one soldier's triumph another's burden?

Such is life, such is war. Still, though: Experience hardens us all, one way or another. It *can* make us more resilient, more fully realized human beings. Iron sharpens iron, as both the Bible and *Game of Thrones* advises.

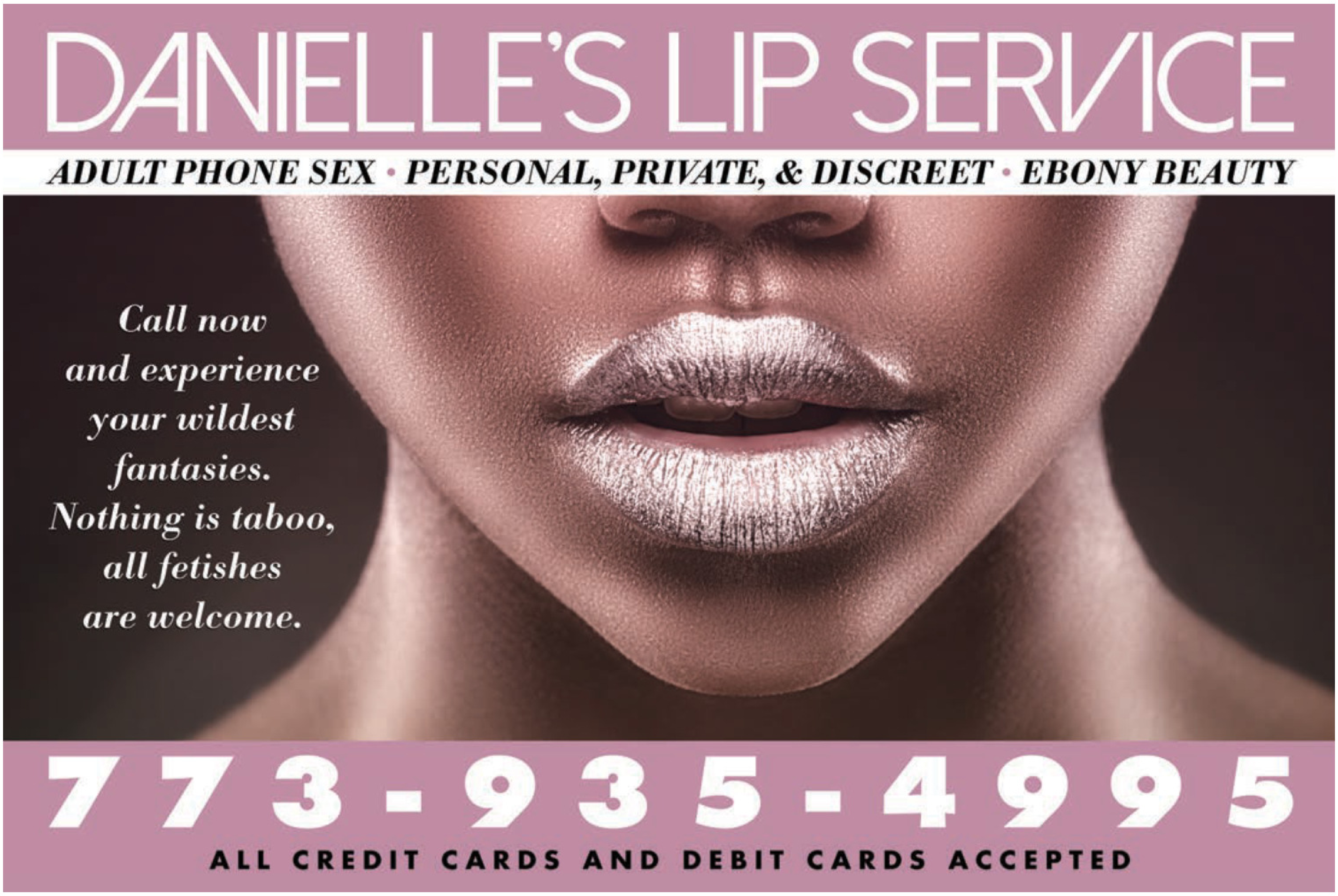
As I was working on this month's column, I bumped into a neighbor down the block who loves my dog and talks to me as a courtesy to the pooch. This neighbor's a quintessential Brooklynite–big and gruff, of Italian heritage, a retired NYPD officer. He doesn't talk a lot about his time on the job, but he's mentioned Ground Zero and 9/11 a couple times in passing. So I know he was there. I know he worked the Pile after, too.

Obliquely, I asked him what he thought about the idea of post-traumatic growth. I asked if he believed it could be a real thing for some folks. For the readers of *Penthouse,* I explained with a wry half-smile.

He considered the question. "Sure," he said. "For those of us lucky to make it through."

I nodded. He bent down to pet my dog some more. Sometimes growth is just that. Making it through because someone has to. Making it through and keeping on. Because someone has to. Through it all, we endure.

Matt Gallagher is a U.S. Army veteran of Iraq and the author of the novel "Youngblood" (Atria/Simon & Schuster).



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Forever Young

VASHTI WINDISH OF WARM DRAG LIVES OUT TRUE ROCK 'N' ROLL.

LIKE most punks, Vashti Windish, frontwoman of L.A. duo Warm Drag, started out as a misfit. "I was always an outcast," she tells *Penthouse*. "My name was weird, my clothes were cheap, and I didn't eat meat."

But things changed when this Florida native became a teenager.

"There was this girl who rode the bus with me, she was scary yet magnetic," Windish recalls. "Her head was shaved, her lip was pierced, and she wore a flannel with cut sleeves and combat boots." Intrigued, the shy Windish eyed her up and down, and the girl introduced herself. "My life was never the same after that."

The two became friends, and Windish was inducted into the world of punk rock. She fell hard for bands like Crass, the Misfits, Ministry, Nitzer Ebb, and Bikini Kill, and found inspiration in their free-spirited, fuck-you attitudes. "These core bands were a gateway drug for other obscure music I'm still finding today," she says.

Windish has since spent her life inspired by music and the powerful aesthetic of rock 'n' roll. When she finally migrated from Florida to New York City, she played in two bands, Golden Triangle and the K-Holes. While in the K-Holes, she met saxophone player Sara Villard, and the two women started a business based on their shared love of costume, stage wear, and designer and vintage clothing. They opened their first store, Worship, in Brooklyn in 2013; another shop followed in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles in 2015.

Though her businesses have been a success, Windish says she could never abandon music. Since moving to L.A., she started her indie-punk duo Warm Drag with drummer Paul Quattrone. The band signed to In the Red Records, and their releases have garnered attention for Windish's powerful, sexy vocals and Quattrone's spacey synth.

Even now, at age 40, Windish still feels the same fearless exhilaration she first experienced with music when she performs onstage with Warm Drag. "I just lose myself," she says. "It's almost like a trance. I don't think. I just feel. It's the best."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSEY BYRNES

PHOTOBOOTH
PHOTOBOOTH

PHOTOBOOTH

Warm Drag

VINTAGE MOTORCYCLE

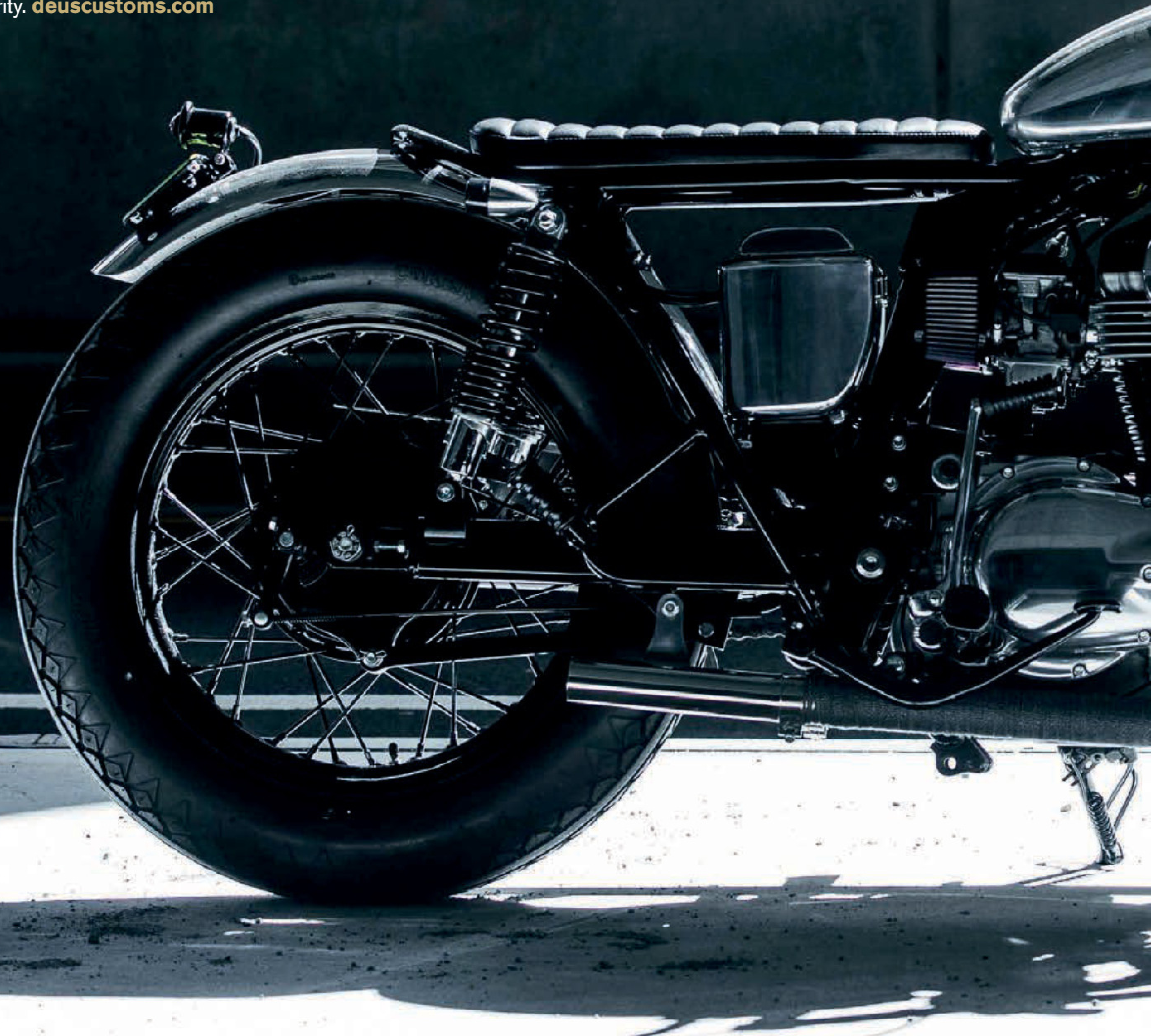
DEUS EX MACHINA CUSTOM RAPOSA PRATA

BASED on one of the most iconic vintage-style bikes on the market, the Kawasaki W Series, the custom-built Raposa Prata is the embodiment of what makes Deus Ex Machina motorcycles such a kickass ride.

One of the first things you'll notice when you jump in the saddle of the Raposa Prata is the painstaking attention to detail: The conversion from old-school classic to modern brat bobber has been done by hand, from the wiring to the stitching, which means they get away with so much more.

Perhaps the cleverest feature of the bike is how they've hidden the electronics inside the handlebars and under the seat in a polished metal box, giving you the authentic look and feel of a retro crotch rocket, but with the modern practicality of a reliable, no-hassle ride.

Like all Deus bikes, this bad boy is a custom order, so you'll need to get in touch with the shop to see what they can do for you. But that only adds to the cool factor and rarity. **deuscustoms.com**



Vintage Look

JEANS

Faeroes Quilted Denim Tapered Jeans
Break up the vintage appeal of your café racer with a more modern cut of denim. These quilted jeans from G-Star keep things old-school, but the great detailing will add to the illusion you built the bike yourself. **g-star.com $190**

SHIRT

Base T-shirt
Keep it simple. The long-sleeve tee is a staple every guy should own–motorcyclist or not. It'll keep you warmer than a regular tee under your leathers, and when you dismount you simply pull up the sleeves and show off your tats. **g-star.com $40**

JACKET

HRD Irving Vincent Brando Leather Jacket
A real motorcycle jacket from a real motorcycle company–and one with an amazing pedigree of racing. The Brando jacket is ballsy as fuck, and the subtle branding on the sleeve is a nod to the champion motorbikes that made its name. **dhr-apparel.com $580**

VINTAGE CAR

ASTON MARTIN DB5

NEED we really introduce the DB5? Made famous by James Bond in *Goldfinger,* and deployed as a sharp-witted running gag in *Skyfall,* this car was an instant classic when it was released in 1963. British race car company Aston Martin applied the Italian design philosophies of its predecessor, the game-changing DB4 grand tourer. This resulted in a gentleman's car that could fly like a bat out of hell, corner like it was on rails, and still look like the driver should be smoking a pipe with a copy of *Penthouse* on the passenger seat.

These cars haven't lost any appeal since then, and the groundbreaking design is still applied to modern Astons. Given how rare DB5s are these days, they're one of the most expensive feathers a car collector can put in his cap, and the holy grail for pretty much every enthusiast with a driver's license. **astonmartin.com**

Vintage Look

SUNGLASSES

Persol PO7649S
Originally made for military pilots and race car drivers in Turin, Italy, Persol shades have stood the test of time, partly because they're made to last. True to its roots, the brand still makes pilot-style glasses like these that'll shade your eyes, no matter what you're driving, riding, or flying. **persol.com $400**

TROUSERS

Oliver Spencer Tab Linen Trousers
Lightweight and stylish, these slim-straight trousers are great for a laid-back Sunday, cruising along in your vintage whip, turning heads as you roll on by, your pussy magnet turned up to 11. **oliverspencer.co.uk $250**

BUYING A VINTAGE CAR

GET BEHIND THE WHEEL

BUYING a secondhand car can be an ordeal at the best of times. Dishonest or missing owner's logbooks, suspicious mileage on the odometer, and rust in the wheel arches can be enough to push buyers to settle for a slightly shittier, albeit brand-new vehicle, which drops in value the second it rolls off the lot.

As a result, entering the vintage car marketplace can be even more daunting. These issues are only amplified–and given the collectability of some cars, the stakes can be high.

With a few key things to look out for, you can put yourself ahead of the time-wasters and tire-kickers and get behind the wheel of a bona fide classic before you can say *American Graffiti*.

- Make sure the odometer is good, but also look at the engine. Proper vintage vehicles that are still on the road have often had at least one thorough engine overhaul, meaning that despite huge mileage on the clock, they're still purring like a cat. Even if you know your way around a set of wrenches, if you're not familiar with the exact model you're looking for, enlist a professional to go over it with a fine-tooth comb.

- Expect to make some repairs, and take note of how much they're going to cost you. It might be as minor as a tear in the upholstery, or as major as replacing a camshaft–either way, you're going to be spending money on this thing. Have a good look at what needs doing right away and what can wait, and budget based on priority.

- Watch the market for a while before making your move. This is not only wise as you'll see more options come up, broadening your chances at snapping up a perfect catch, but it'll also give you a good scope of how the pricing works for that model, and whether you're bagging a bargain or being taken for a ride.

VINTAGE AT HOME

RETRO MAN CAVE

IN the 1950s, women held their domain in the kitchen, and no pad was complete without a separate space for the man of the house.

Things are a lot different now, and man caves are more of a luxury, but if you are lucky enough to have one, here are some must-have items to give it a feel as vintage as the concept itself.

1. SMEG MINI FRIDGE

The Italian design outfit is responsible for the most famous retro-revival appliance ever (with some thanks to Jamie Oliver), but this mini fridge belongs in a man cave, not the kitchen. Available in various colors to match your pad; fill it with beer and nothing else. **bedbathandbeyond.com $999**

2. NELSON SUNBURST CLOCK

The sunburst clock is back in vogue and with good reason: It looks rad. It screams retro style without going overboard and is a simple, masculine addition to any room—but specifically your own. **dwr.com $460**

3. VINTAGE STYLE TV

If there's one culture that has warmly embraced the whole vintage thing it's the Japanese, and technology is kinda their thing. This TV is as modern as they come, in every way except for its looks. Still too modern for you? Turn the color to black and white for extra authenticity. **japantrendshop.com $879**

4. CROSLEY BERMUDA TURNTABLE

Nothing beats vinyl for an authentic retro feel (and sound quality, for that matter). Dust off your vinyl collection or connect to your streaming service via Bluetooth with this portable standing turntable, modeled after the iconic Dansette record players of yore. **crosleyradio.com $230**

5. TIKI MUGS

No man cave is complete without an array of vessels for booze consumption, and what better way to ingest hard liquor than from a ceramic demon head? Perfect for all your rum-based classics—extra points if you set the drink on fire. **retroplanet.com $60/set of nine**

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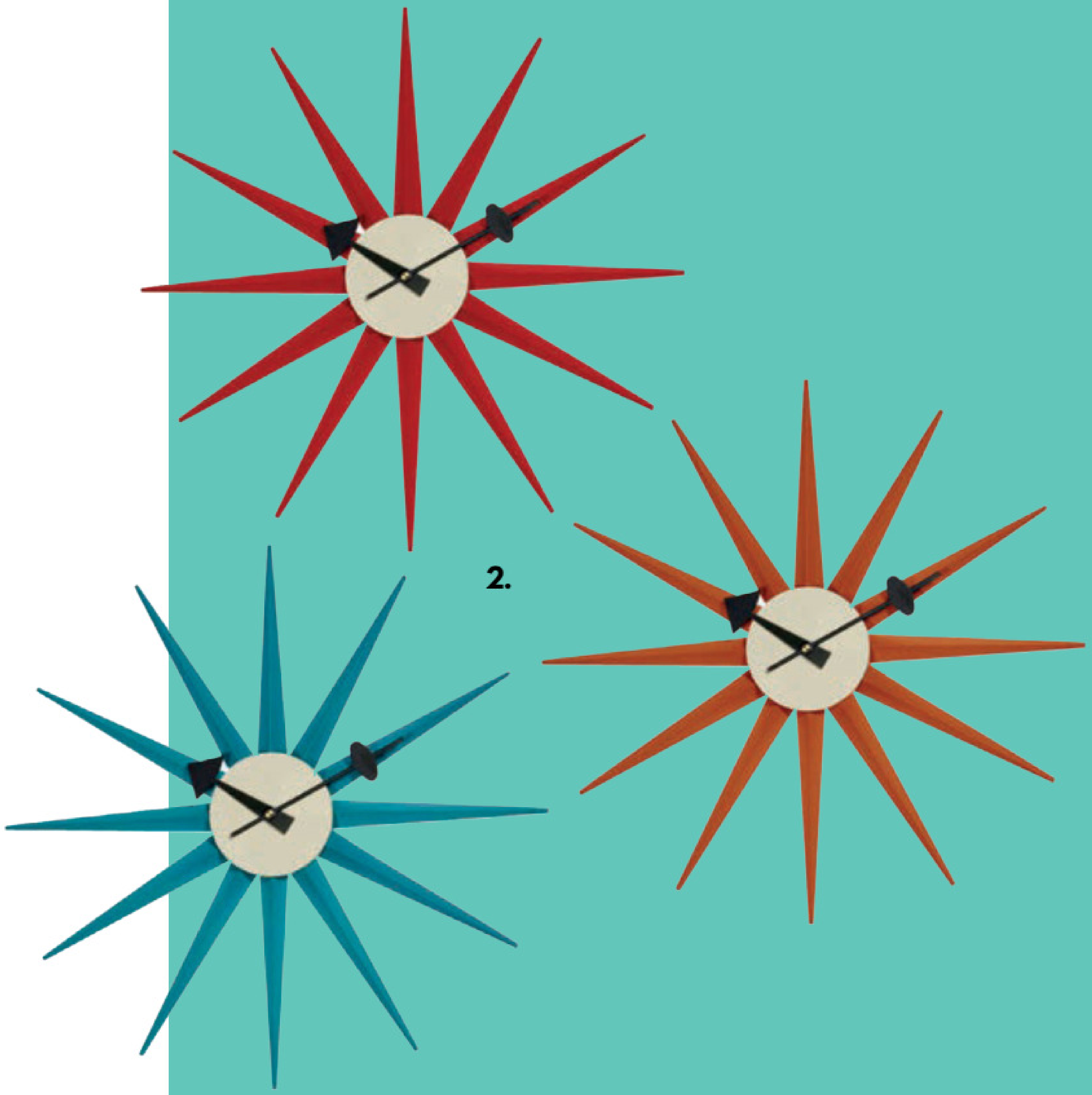

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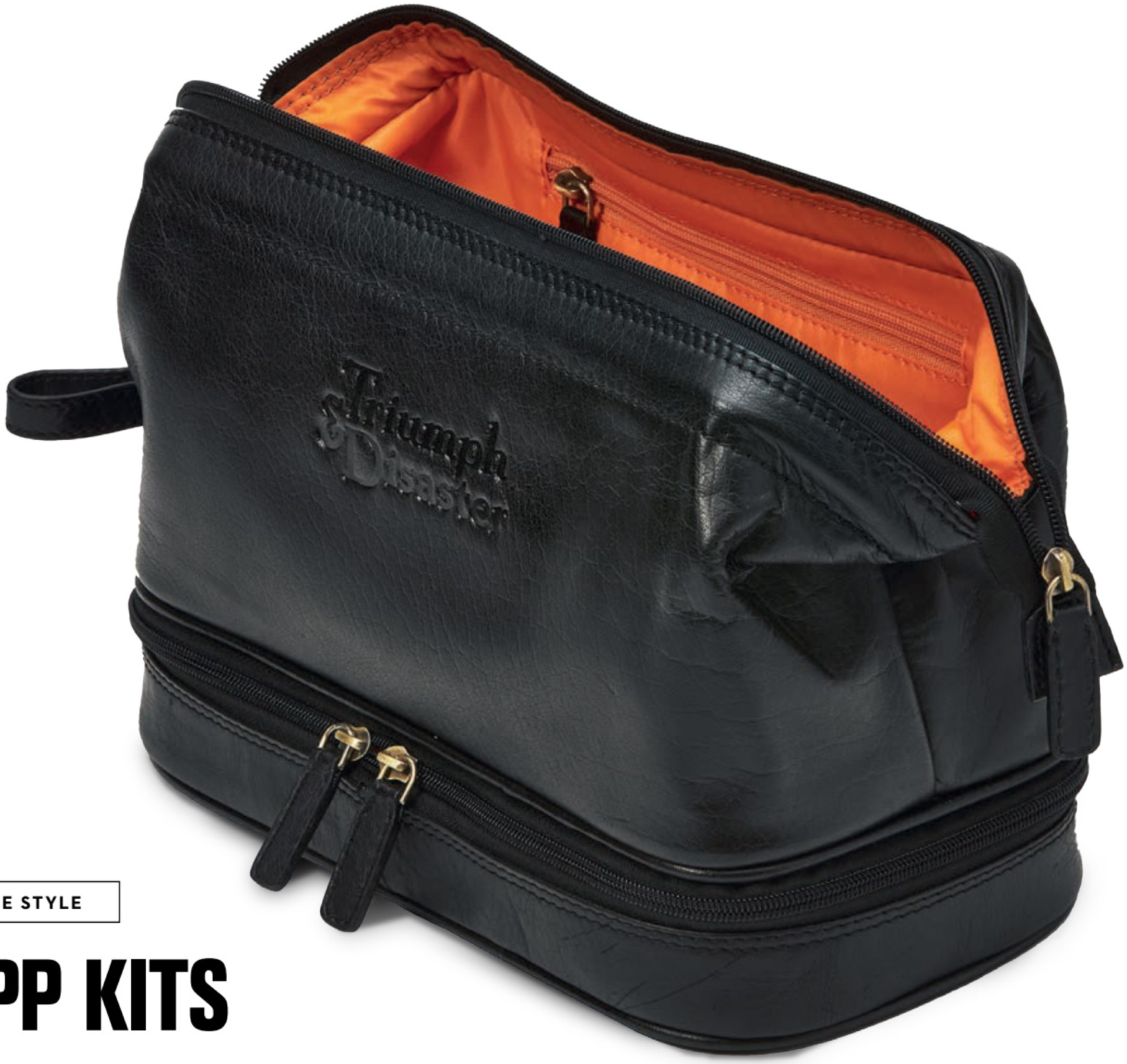
TUNES

VINTAGE JUKEBOX

Not as easily sourced as one may think, a proper jukebox is the ultimate cave addition for the retro-inclined man. Scour eBay for the best results, and expect to do some repairs yourself—but trust us, the extra effort is worth it; this is as cool an appliance as you can get. **ebay.com**

CROSLEY
MAKE SELECTIONS
COINS



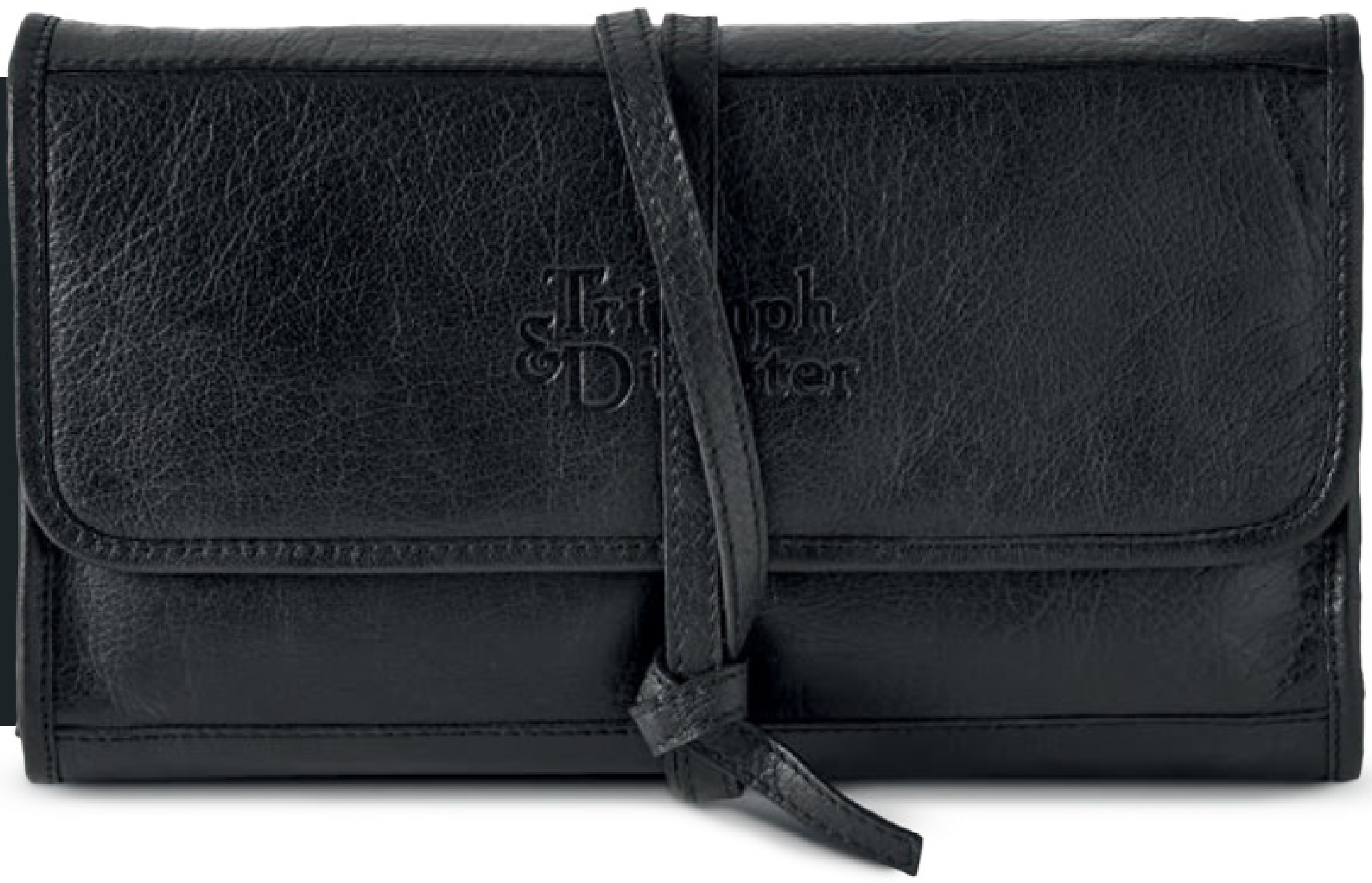
VINTAGE STYLE

DOPP KITS

WHILE it may not be anything you think much about when packing for your vacation, a Dopp kit is one of man's more important accessories. Named after the leather craftsman, Charles Doppelt, whose company designed it in 1926, the Dopp kit is an absolute necessity when you're on the road, and a good one will last you a lifetime.

FRANK THE DOPP
Styled like an old-fashioned portmanteau, this is the only Dopp kit you'll ever need. It's made of leather with a tough, waterproof synthetic lining, and has a separate base compartment, which means it'll stop your toothbrush from cuddling up to your toenail clippers while you're traveling. Because that's fucking disgusting. **triumphanddisaster.us $105**

FIELD KIT
Similar to Frank, but made for longer adventures, the Triumph & Disaster Field Kit is the kind of Dopp you want when you're hauling your ass across continents. The folding leather case comes with a brass hanging hook, zippered compartments, and canvas pockets–all things that'll come in handy when you're exploring new frontiers.
triumphanddisaster.us $150



VINTAGE STYLE

LOOK SLICK

GONE are days of a $10 chop at the local Supercuts. Throwback haircuts, coiffed and styled in old-school barbershops, are what's happening now.

Keeping your hair looking halfway decent between cuts can be frustrating if you're not as practiced as your barber or stylist, but any of them would tell you (and probably already have) that a quality pomade is the best place to start. Here are some products we like that will help tame your manly mane.

UPPERCUT DELUXE

This company is partly responsible for bringing back the 50s greaser look a few years ago. Their pomade will grease your locks superbly, with the convenience of being water-soluble, so it rinses out like a gel. The coconut and vanilla scent might tempt you to eat it, but don't.
uppercutdeluxe.com/us/ $20

BURLY FELLOW FIRM HOLD

The coconut and mango smell of this pomade will smack you in the face as soon as you open the tin, which may or may not be a good thing. But it has a super-high shine and is water-based, so it will rinse out with ease.
burlyfellow.com $14

MODERN PIRATE SUPERIOR

One of the most versatile pomades out there, this one contains pomegranate seed extract and vitamin E, which will nourish your scalp, if you care about that sort of thing. Use more water for a relaxed look, or apply liberally to dry hair for a firmer hold.
walmart.com $18

TRIUMPH & DISASTER COLTRANE CLAY

Want to rock the rugged greaser look but without the shine? This one is made for longer, slicked-back 'dos but with a matte finish. White wax, beeswax, and Pracaxi oil are what will give you that firm but malleable hold.
triumphanddisaster.com.us $30

UPPERCUT
★ DELUXE POMADE ★
Net wt 100g/3.5 oz.

FIRM HOLD • HIGH SHINE
WATER
POMADE
Burly Fellow
3.5oz/100gms

SUPERIOR HAIR POMADE
MODERN
PIRATE
THE ROUGHER THE SEAS, THE SMOOTHER THE STYLE

COLTRANE
ARGILE
MODELANTE
by Triumph&Disaster
Net Wt. 3.35 Oz
95g
CLAY

WALLACE AND HIS CHECKERBOARD

BY JOE DEROSA

THE toilet water bubbled. A few scraps of toilet paper, dropped into the basin by the stall's previous occupant, became less and less visible as his blast of pee pushed it further down into the water. A mean piss. The strength of his stream was probably the reason this toilet bowl was complaining so much. Pissing and moaning, you could say of the basin's protest, yelling at Wallace in plain English. Not that he hadn't been yelled at recently by his own toilet at home. But this was the first time a commode had bitched at him in public.

It was awkward, having this happen in the men's room of the Salmon Ladder, his favorite Seattle bar. Wallace knew the guy in the next stall couldn't hear the toilet's yammering. But unfortunately, he couldn't stop himself from responding in kind. "Just shut up and receive the piss!" Wallace yelled. "You're a fucking toilet, for Christ's sake! What'd you think was going to happen here?!"

Before he could take much satisfaction in his retort, he heard his stall neighbor speed-zip his pants, throw open the stall door, and make a quick exit. Clearly the guy's alarm outweighed any curiosity about why a grown man was verbally abusing a toilet bowl. But hey, this dude probably had never been demeaned by a kitchen coffeemaker. Or had a sink spit mouthwash back up at his face. Or had a refrigerator refuse to open its door because it wanted to continue its Sunday afternoon "nap."

No, the bathroom-fleeing patron could never understand the crap being served up in Wallace's life right now. And up until a few weeks ago, Wallace himself couldn't have understood it either. A few weeks back, he would have run out of the stall, too, chased away by the Toilet Shouter.

Before the trouble started, Wallace had been enjoying a routine life, with a boring nine-to-five, a shitty apartment he struggled to make rent on, and three umbrellas—a big one and two small cheapos to cope with Seattle's rain.

That was before he brought home the checkerboard.

It had been love at first sight: a worn wooden box with squares painted on top, a hinged lid, and checkers stored in the compartment. It was a dignified set. A checkerboard fit for a grown-up. As chance would have it, Wallace had just vowed to start playing checkers against himself, something he'd done as a kid. It would help him unwind after work. There was only so much TV a guy could watch.

Back when he was rotting away during his 11-year marriage, Ellen didn't like him doing stuff that made him happy. She would have mocked him for playing checkers. But Ellen was history now. He'd finally found the gumption to move out. His ex-wife—aka the Succubitch—had bled him dry, financially and emotionally. He hadn't quite recovered, on either front. But at least he no longer had to hear her wheedling voice or watch her eat pickled herring, that Norwegian food she ate because it reminded her of her late mother.

As the 42-year-old assistant manager of Seattle's largest Salvation Army store, Wallace worked long hours, and his take-home pay was modest. The benefits were good, though, including full dental. He liked a few of his coworkers, and a couple of store regulars told amusing stories.

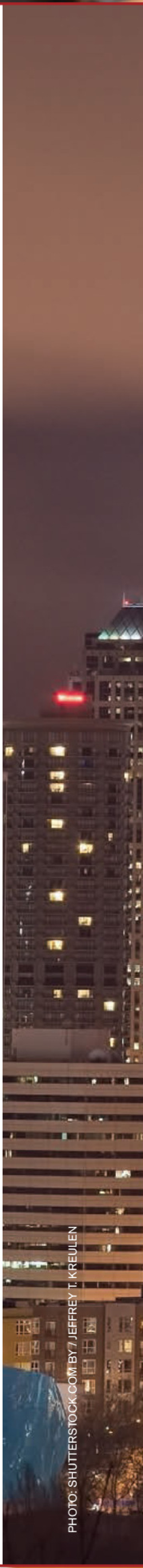
On the negative side, his 29-year-old boss, Todd, holder of some kind of accounting degree, was a dick. Also, some of their customers…well, some could be a bit odiferous. Still, he preferred them to the hipsters. Bargain-hunting trustafarians, half of them. He could practically read their minds when they glanced at him: *Look at this dork with his pricing gun, nametag, beige pants, and short-sleeve button-down.* Whatever. Artist-wannabes. Unemployed millennials making peanuts in the "gig economy."

It's true, Wallace wasn't living the dream. But every day there was a reminder that things could be worse. His store served people unsure where their next meal would come from, or where they'd sleep that night.

And he could still take pleasure in little things. Stuff as small as the McDonald's Dollar Menu made him happy. He felt true elation when Verizon mistakenly refunded some charges he'd racked up. And the sight of the checkerboard had put a literal smile on his face.

It had been sitting on a dusty, shadowed shelf next to a donated game of Risk. It had just arrived, he knew, since he'd inspected that same shelf the day before. Gazing at the game board, he pictured himself at home in his kitchen, playing checkers, bottle of Redhook in hand. Only problem? Employees weren't allowed to put dibs on store items.

But Wallace had an idea. The game hadn't been priced yet. Strike that. It lacked a price sticker, which meant one of three things: an employee screwed up, a customer peeled it off, or an unknown person, perhaps put off by a line at the donation counter, had shelved it themselves. This fact,



BACKGROUND PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM BY / STAS MALYAREVSKY

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM BY / JEFFREY T. KREULEN

combined with a store policy allowing employees to purchase items if they sat unbought for a month, gave Wallace an opening.

He went to his pricing station and checked their computerized item intake log. There was no record of the checkerboard. Which meant it had no official price in their system. So he logged it in and priced it at $18.50. Experience told him this number was high enough to discourage purchase, but not so high that it communicated "vintage" or "artisanal" to a hipster.

Pricing was one of Wallace's most important responsibilities. The Salvation Army existed to provide affordable goods to those on extremely limited budgets. Revenue helped feed and clothe the homeless, and aided people in addiction recovery. As an assistant manager (only managers were allowed to price), he had to hit the bargain-price sweet spot: affordable, but not so discounted that revenue was miniscule. His pricing impacted lives. A 25-cent difference on a sweater could mean the difference between a poor schmuck making it through a January night or not.

But a checkerboard's not a necessity, he told himself. No one would freeze without it. Furthermore, compared to all the colossal greed and deception in the wider world, his little scheme was so small you'd need an electron microscope to see it. It was...a peccadillo. A peccadillo, he learned in high school, is "a small, relatively unimportant offense or sin."

Feeling a fizz of rebellion, he used a black Sharpie to write $18.50 on a price sticker. Manager Todd was at the other end of the huge floor. Back in the game aisle, Wallace stickered the checkerboard in one quick, fluid movement, then nudged it deeper into the shadows. If a coworker brought the high price to his attention sometime in the next month, he'd say, "Oh, darn! I think I know what happened. Brainfart! I was tuckered out that day. I had just priced a nice set of kitchen china with a red and black checkerboard pattern at $18.50, and obviously my wires got crossed!"

HE COULD FEEL HIS TEMPER RISING NOW, HIS CHEEKS WARM. IT WAS JUST HIS LUCK TO HAVE THE CHECKERBOARD OF HIS DREAMS TURN OUT TO BE POSSESSED. THE ONE TIME HE BREAKS A RULE IN HIS LIFE.

Thirty days passed. The board went unsold. It was satisfying handing their new hire, Janice, $18.50 in bills and coins from his special checkerboard fund (employees weren't allowed to ring up their own purchases). Janice didn't bat an eye.

Back home that night, Wallace contentedly placed 24 plastic checkers into their red and black painted squares. As he did, he reflected on the snobbery of chess players. In his opinion, real men played checkers. He imagined himself saying the following to a haughty chessmaster: "Unlike your game, mine has no queen. It's all about kings and crowns. Dare I say...checkmate?"

With his hand poised to move a checker for the first time in what would become a nightly tradition, Wallace realized something. He realized he should paint "Property of Wallace B. Kelly" in red enamel paint on the bottom of the storage compartment. Grinning, he hopped up to check his junk drawer, where he recalled a tube of such paint resided. Bingo.

Striding back to the table, merry as a quiz-show contestant with the right answer, he froze. *What the hell.* A black checker had moved to a new square. Had he bumped the table getting up? Before he could form another thought, his cell phone rang. It was an unknown local number.

"Hello?" Wallace answered. The caller hung up. *Fine,* he thought. *I have a game of checkers to play, jerky spam caller.*

He held the black checker up to his bespectacled eyes, staring at it. As he did, he heard a faint sound. It was the sound of a sliding checker. Oh shit. Heart starting to race, he gazed at the checkerboard. Another black checker had moved diagonally, from one black square to an adjacent one. *What the hell?* Wallace thought for a second time.

A tantrum-thrower as a kid, he'd always had a temper. It could come out of nowhere, and virtually never did him any good. He could feel his temper rising now, his cheeks warm. It was just his luck to have the checkerboard of his dreams turn out to be possessed. The one time he breaks a rule in his life. And he'd showed so much patience, waiting out the month.

More angry than scared, Wallace B. Kelly barked, "I paid good money for you! And you pull this crap?!"

That's when the checkerboard's lid raised by itself. Red and black checkers slid onto the kitchen table, a couple falling to the floor. And from inside the storage compartment came a mocking male voice: "Jesus, you're pathetic. What are you, five years old?"

* * *

AND so it began. This was the night when a new age in Wallace's life kicked off, an age where the objects of this world—products, items, lifeless constructions of wood, glass, plastic, steel—harangued him. Insulted him.

On night one, in his kitchen, Wallace grew furious. He hurled the game board to the floor and jumped on it with both feet, collapsing the lid. The board shut up, then. He rounded up the checkers, picked up the wrecked board, and marched out of his apartment. The checkers got a ride down the garbage chute. He flung the trashed wooden board into a parking-lot dumpster.

A month of obsessing over this checkerboard, and it was all gone to shit in minutes. It was Ellen all over again "Enjoy the landfill," he hissed into the dumpster before stomping off.

But parting ways with the board didn't solve anything. Things just got worse. Way worse. Wallace had no idea what he'd done to deserve such treatment, and no clue as to who or what was behind his torment. Appliances teased him. He couldn't even stock the shelves at his job anymore without having to defend himself.

"Fuck you, Hamilton Beach popcorn popper," he whispered, before noticing a customer staring at him.

Not long into this hell, his flat-screen TV—the priciest object in his apartment—wouldn't turn on. When Wallace slapped the back of it, the sleek Panasonic said, "Yo, couch potato, I'm taking the night off. Go polish your dolphin or something."

His toilet turned out to be a real prick. "Greetings, Pencil Dick," it said one morning, before adding: "You know what, Kelly? You're an asshole. And I should know." His shower wouldn't turn on. "Work stoppage," the showerhead quipped. "I might not spray water, Wally B., but I'm dripping with sarcasm. Ha ha ha ha ha ha!"

Wallace began to smell. It didn't help that the washing machines in his apartment building took his money, refused to function, and called him names. Twice, at work, Todd took Wallace aside and said both customers and coworkers had complained about his personal hygiene and habit of swearing at donated items. Five long showerless weeks later, the inevitable happened. Wallace got fired.

"I hope you get the help you need," Todd said, not unkindly.

Out in the parking lot, Wallace's 2005 Chevy Cavalier kicked

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM BY / AMMIT JACK

him, verbally, while he was down. First the car wouldn't allow him to open the driver's door. Then, after Wallace pounded the hood, it snapped, "Take the bus, Stanky. Better yet, jump in Puget Sound."

God, did Wallace need a drink. But his stench—which had strange notes of sulfur and rotten fruit, overpowering every deodorant he'd tried—would empty a bar inside of a minute.

Suddenly he got an idea. It gave him a bit of hope. What if I doused myself in aftershave? Wallace thought. The words OLD SPICE lit up in his brain like a neon sign. He went to a CVS a block from the Salmon Ladder, bought two bottles of Old Spice aftershave, stepped into an alley, and was thrilled when the white and red containers actually let themselves be opened. He soaked himself in the concoction, emptying both bottles. Five minutes later he walked into the bar.

Greg, just starting his day shift, seemed surprised to see him. "Hi, Greg," Wallace said to the bearded bartender. "I know I smell strongly of Old Spice. Long story. Could I have a shot of Beam and a pitcher of Redhook, please?" Greg gave him a quick look, but said, "Sure, Wallace."

Forty-five minutes later, while pissing like a race horse, Wallace scared a guy out of the bathroom with his toilet-directed tirade, and mid-insult, the toilet retaliated by spraying him with yellow toilet water. Wallace's temper escalated.

"You're a fucking piece of shit, you know that?!" he yelled at the toilet.

Responding in kind, the toilet, with help from its plumbing, fired a turd left by the stall's previous occupant into Wallace's face. He went apeshit.

Kicking and punching the commode in a blind fury, Wallace screamed, "That's one for the Succubitch! And two for Todd! And three for Seattle hipsters! And four for that fucking checkerboard!"

Then—like an enraged baseball manager going nose-to-nose with an ump—he braced his hands on the commode's wet rim, lowered his face within an inch of the befouled water, and bellowed, "NOT SUCH A BIG TOUGH GUY NOW, ARE YA, TOILET?!"

The commode power-flushed. With a hideous whirlpool sound, it sucked Wallace downward, his cheeks slamming porcelain like his head was a thrust plunger. Such was the strength of the suction, his face formed a tight seal with the trapway opening, and as the epic flush continued, the basin filled and overflowed. He didn't stand a chance.

By the time Greg rushed in and wrenched his customer free, Wallace was as lifeless, as inanimate, as the multitude of objects that had mocked and disparaged him for 37 straight days.

Joe DeRosa is an L.A.-based comedian, writer, director, and actor ("Better Call Saul" and "Louie"). A lifelong fan of dark fiction, weird tales, and anthology horror, this story comes from his book project, "Some Severe Situations."

DIRTY MOTEL

I WORK as a hospitality consultant, traveling around the country and telling people how to fix their hotels. Usually I travel alone, but my company recently hired a hot young trainee named Jeff to shadow me.

One day, Jeff and I were assigned a client a couple hundred miles outside our city: a countryside hotel, a place that wasn't accessible by planes or trains. Because my boss felt bad about sending us to such a bumfuck location, he rented us a fancy red convertible for the trip.

Almost immediately, our supposedly awesome road trip took a turn for the worse. The sky turned a bizarre greenish gray before unleashing a torrent of cold, driving rain. We pulled over, scrambling to pull up the convertible's canvas top, getting drenched in the process.

Then the road started to flood—slowly at first, until suddenly we were driving through rushing water. At one point the country highway we were on became totally impassable, and Jeff had no choice but to turn down a narrow road that cut through miles of dense woods.

For almost an hour, we passed nothing but trees, until finally, a yellow light glowed in the distance. Nowhere near our destination, we headed toward the light, hoping for a place to ride out the weather.

At last, a roadside motel appeared. I joked to Jeff how it looked the Bates Motel from *Psycho*. But knowing we would never make it to our client that night, we decided to stop and get a couple of rooms.

After checking in with the elderly desk clerk (who in no way resembled Norman Bates, thank God), we headed to our rooms. We'd gotten soaked leaving the car, and a whipping wind drenched us again, even beneath the motel's roof overhang.

Desperate to warm up, I raced into my room and began stripping off my clothes. I peeled off my soaked blouse, then did the same with my skirt. I was standing there in my wet bra and panties, about to head to the shower, when the wind blew my door open with a bang. A moment later, Jeff appeared in the doorway, alarmed by the noise.

The surprised expression on his face at my near-naked body was soon replaced by a slow, mischievous smile. Never taking his eyes off me, he stepped into the room and gently closed the door.

"Mind if I warm you up?" he asked.

"Not at all," I responded, with absolutely no thought given to the question.

His roving eyes felt like fire on my skin. A searing blush spread from my cheeks to my chest, erasing the goosebumps that had been there since the rain started . The space between my thighs grew hot and I could honestly say that every inch of my body was now soaking wet.

Jeff put the door's security chain in place and sat down on the bed, wiping his hand back and forth across the bedspread, inviting me to join him.

THE SPACE BETWEEN MY THIGHS GREW HOT AND I COULD HONESTLY SAY THAT EVERY INCH OF MY BODY WAS NOW SOAKING WET.

Emboldened by the way Jeff's gaze devoured me, I peeled the sopping cups of my bra away from my breasts, gasping as my swollen nipples were exposed to the chilly room. Then I rolled my damp cotton panties off and kicked them away.

Jeff stripped off his own wet clothes and crawled under the covers, giving me a quick glimpse of his own naked, athletic body.

"Get over here, boss lady," he said, patting the bed at his side.

I'd barely settled my ass on the edge of the mattress when Jeff wrapped an arm around my waist, pulling me under the covers with him. He curved his warm body around mine, nestling his cock between my ass cheeks.

Wanting to feel more of him, I wiggled my hips, liking that I could feel him harden against me. Then the hand that had settled on my stomach started moving lower, slipping between my thighs to stroke my pussy.

My body melted under Jeff's touch, and all of a sudden I stopped shivering. As my muscles relaxed, my back arched like a cat's, pushing my ass harder against his cock.

Taking my cue to keep going, Jeff parted the folds of my pussy with his fingers, spreading the liquid arousal that had collected there.

I leaned into him with a sigh, wiggling my ass against his cock some more. The soft, taut skin slid against my cheeks, hot and hard. Still, as close as he held me, it wasn't enough. I wanted to taste him, to run my fingers through his dark, wet hair as I kissed him.

I turned around slowly, winding my arms around his neck and pulling him close for a deep, open-mouth kiss. He tasted salty and sweet, like the chocolate pretzels we'd been snacking on in the car, only better.

We stayed like that for a while, kissing and cuddling, exploring each other's bodies, my fingers sliding easily through his sodden locks.

Then suddenly, with a grunt, Jeff rolled me onto my back, stretching out on top of me so that his body caged mine. I lifted my arms over my head, signaling that he was in control.

Jeff took the reins with gusto, using a large, strong hand to grip my wrists and hold them over my head. "So boss lady doesn't like being in control all the time, huh," he murmured against my lips.

Not trusting my voice to stay steady, I offered a naughty smile instead.

Jeff smiled back, a wicked glint in his eyes. "Well, as your subordinate, it's my duty to fulfill your desires," he said.

I closed my eyes, intent on absorbing all the sensations coursing through my body. Another kiss from Jeff seemed to emit a shower of sparks over my skin, making my lips tingle beneath his.

Slowly, his mouth moved away from my lips, trailing a path to my neck. He nuzzled the sensitive spot behind my earlobe, giving it a quick nip before soothing the skin with another soft kiss.

A dull pulse pounded a steady beat between my legs. I ached for Jeff, and wanted to feel that thick cock inside me. I longed to feel him slowly slide in, stretching my walls until I fit him perfectly.

But Jeff seemed content to take his time exploring. His long, muscular body made it easy for him to keep my wrists restrained as he slid down my torso, licking and kissing my skin along the way. When he neared my hips, he brought my arms down onto my stomach, keeping a tight grip. Then he nipped a line across the sensitive skin beneath my belly button.

I groaned, rubbing my thighs together to try to quell the insistent pulse between them. Although Jeff was still a ways from my clit, I felt little twinges there every time his teeth grazed my skin.

Though I'd pledged to cede control, I longed to touch him, to map his body by molding it against mine. My legs drifted apart and I wiggled against him, trying to touch him with the rest of my body, as my hands were still bound tightly by his grip.

Unfortunately, that was the closest I would get to exploring this man. Jeff's weight held me down, leaving little room to move. Instead, I sank deeper into the mattress, completely relaxed as my subordinate consumed me.

After tracing a path from hip to hip with his tongue, Jeff moved further down. He pressed his nose to the apex of my thighs, breathing in deep as he nuzzled close to my clit.

Then he looked up at me and said, "I'll let go of your hands, but you have to keep them in one place. Cup your breasts."

He loosened his grip, allowing my wrists to slip from his hold.

Eager to please, I skimmed my hands over my belly and up to my breasts. The tips of my fingers grazed their underside, pressing against the soft flesh. Then I cradled them in my palms, allowing my nipples to peek out from between my fingers.

"You're so obedient," Jeff murmured against my thigh. Then he sealed his lips over my clit and sucked, drawing the sensitive nub between his teeth.

My moans echoed off the motel room's paper-thin walls. It felt like an electrical charge pulsing through my veins, making my arms and legs jerk from the force of it.

Ever the overachiever, Jeff read my body's signals, allowing them to guide him in his quest to make me come. He kept his lips tight around my clit as he flicked it with his tongue, plying me with the pressure I so desperately craved.

JEFF'S THICK, PULSING COCK THAT HAD FELT SO GOOD AGAINST MY ASS WAS SLIPPING INSIDE ME NOW, STRETCHING MY PUSSY WIDE.

Then I felt Jeff's fingers part my folds once more. He rubbed the thick, sensitive lips, and then slid three fingers inside, fucking me intently. The result was mind-blowing, pushing me into an orgasm that practically lifted my body off the bed.

Just as I finished, my moans of ecstasy finally subsiding, Jeff slid his hands underneath my ass and scooped me up, raising my hips to meet his own.

Jeff's thick, pulsing cock that had felt so good against my ass was slipping inside me now, stretching my pussy wide. We hadn't bothered with a condom and I seriously didn't give a fuck. I wanted his hot come inside me. To feel the full force of his pleasure that my body inspired.

Once Jeff was fully in me, he pulled back slowly, stopping when only the tip remained inside. He paused that way for a moment, looking me straight in the eyes, his steely gray irises sparkling. Then he slammed back into me, causing my head to push against the headboard.

A sly smile spread across Jeff's face as he pulled out to the tip, then drove it back in again. The position angled my body upward, amplifying the sensations and pulling a scream from me with every thrust.

Jeff set a punishing pace, making my body move forward on the bed every time he buried himself inside me. Like a well-oiled machine, whenever I was pushed away, Jeff's flexed his powerful biceps and pulled me back, tossing me like a rag doll.

When Jeff slowed, my body went into overdrive. Something about that change in rhythm made my pussy walls twitch, rippling over Jeff's dick. Meanwhile, my breath caught in my chest. It was as

though my brain could only focus on one body part at a time, and my pussy had claimed its undivided attention.

Finally, it felt like all the air came rushing back into my lungs. Instead of just my pussy, my whole body began to twitch, opening the floodgates for a rush of hot, wet come.

As my body began to relax, Jeff let out a long, strangled moan of his own. His grip around my thighs tightened as he pumped his hot jizz into me.

Once his breathing slowed, Jeff eased my body down and lay next to me, pulling me close before tugging the sheets back over our bodies, marking our first night of many together.

—Elizabeth D., Cleveland, Ohio

DOUBLE STUFF

ON my first solo vacation ever, I finally experienced the awesomeness of having two guys at once.

I had just finished dinner at a local bar and was ready to call it a night when two men appeared on either side of me. We chatted and ordered some drinks, and before long I'd agreed to accompany them back to their place.

Not bothering to linger in the dark living room of the apartment Max and Josh shared, we headed straight for Max's bedroom, settling ourselves in the center of his king-size bed.

Within seconds, both men descended, showering my neck and chest with kisses and soft bites. Their large, rough hands slid beneath the hem of my dress, skimming over my thighs and tummy before tugging the garment over my head.

Not having bothered with a bra or panties that evening, my body was immediately and completely exposed. The air conditioner that hummed in the window sent an icy breeze straight to my hardening nipples—a stark contrast to the flames that licked across my skin as both men caressed me.

I swayed between them, relying on their strength to hold me steady as my muscles relaxed under their touch. Then, finally, Josh's hand landed between my thighs, parting the slick folds of my pussy. His finger began to spread the juice that

BOTH MEN EASED INTO ME AT EXACTLY THE SAME MOMENT, FILLING ME FROM BOTH ENDS.

flowed freely, then slipped inside me.

Meanwhile, Max had sealed his lips over mine, plunging his tongue into my mouth while Josh drove me wild down below.

As Max swallowed my every sigh and groan, he continued to explore the contours of my body. One hand stroked my thighs and hips, while the other palmed the underside of my breast, testing its weight before trapping my nipple between its fingers.

Every twist of Max's fingers sent seismic shocks to my clit. Desperate to relieve the need that throbbed there, I started to hump Josh's finger, forcing him to penetrate me deeper.

Josh chuckled, entertained by my enthusiasm. Then he pressed the heel of his palm against my clit, applying just the right pressure to make my body jolt. Clearly a knowledgable lover, he crooked his finger, using the tip to massage the spongey bundle of nerves that I quickly learned was my G spot.

Suddenly, my pussy seized on Josh's finger, holding it in place while my inner muscles rolled and rippled over him. A powerful orgasm surged through my body. My head tilted back, breaking me away from Max's lips, as my cries echoed through the room, drowning out the noise of the air conditioner.

Weak and semi-delirious, I allowed Max and Josh to position my body into doggie-style. Max kneeled in front, his thick cock bobbing in front of my face, while Josh situated himself behind me.

I heard some rustling and turned my head to see Josh reaching into a box of condoms on the nightstand. Max and I waited a moment as Josh swiftly got a condom out of its foil wrapper and used one hand to roll the latex sheath over his shaft. Once Josh was ready, Max, looking over my head, grinned at his roommate as he positioned the tip of his dick in front of my mouth.

Both men eased into me at exactly the same moment, filling me from both ends. I sat skewered between them, able to move only as far as they allowed.

I moaned as Josh began to fuck me, the sounds of my pleasure rolling over Max's dick, adding a new level of vibration to the blowjob.

The two men bounced me back and forth, perfectly matching one another's rhythm so that I rocked steadily between them. As my moans intensified, so did Max's grip on my head. He wound his fingers through my hair, using his hold on me to steady himself as he increased his speed.

Josh responded in kind, plowing me with such intensity that it wasn't long before I felt my pussy tighten a second time. I gasped and cursed as my muscles began to spasm, though my mouth was so full it was impossible for me to cry out loud.

But Max could feel it. The inside of my mouth positively vibrated from the pent-up noise. With nowhere else to go, it washed over Max's dick, producing a steady hum that tickled his sensitive skin, massaging his shaft in a way that my pussy couldn't.

Despite this, Max pulled away. Panting, he swept his arm over his brow, wiping away the sweat.

Taking a cue from his roommate, Josh also pulled out. Suddenly, I had no one supporting me, nothing to hold me upright. My pleasure-soaked muscles gave out, causing my body to collapse onto the mattress.

Fortunately, I had two strong men to help me up. Max sat back on the bed, hooked his arms under mine, and dragged me backward to the space between his thighs. He then reached over to the nightstand and grabbed a bottle of lube, snapping open the lid with a flick of his thumb. Then he tilted the bottle over his rigid cock, dousing himself.

Once his dick was nice and slippery, Max lifted me up and over him. The tip of his dick pushed against my ass, prodding me as he asked, "How do you feel about a little assplay?"

"Oh, yeah," I groaned, reaching back and guiding his cock to my asshole.

My eyes opened wide as Max slowly filled me. The long, drawn-out intrusion was so fucking hot. I gasped and groaned as he pushed himself in.

Throwing an arm around my waist, Max pulled my torso back against his chest, tilting my body in a way that relieved a bit of the

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pressure in my asshole.

I closed my eyes and sighed. The more I allowed my body to relax, the better it felt to have Max's manhood stuffed up my ass. The sensitive skin inside me rippled and twitched, drawing his dick just a tiny bit deeper.

It wasn't just my asshole that seemed to sing as Max entered me. My pussy pulsed as well. Despite feeling devastatingly empty compared to its neighbor around back, it reverberated from the force of every thrust.

Finally, Josh rejoined our game. He scooped up my ankles and raised my legs over my head, lifting me up as Max lay farther back on the bed.

My knees knocked behind my ears, causing Max's dick to slip from my asshole just a bit. Of course, now my pussy was on full display as well.

Josh grabbed hold of his dick and pressed the tip against my pussy lips. Then, holding my gaze, he slid himself inside, one agonizing inch at a time. "That's right, dirty girl," he said. "Open up for me."

Ever the obedient fuck buddy, I dropped my legs wider, stretching myself to accommodate Josh's generous girth.

Now both men were buried inside me. I felt impossibly full, torn between anguish and ecstasy.

Though both men had entered completely different holes on opposite sides of my body, it felt like their dicks were touching. They didn't say anything, but I could tell they were into it. Each of them grunted and groaned as they fucked me, feeding on one another's pleasure, allowing it to spur them into increasing their speed.

Much like before, I bounced between them, gasping for breath as another orgasm threatened to devour me whole. Unable to remain open as my muscles spasmed and twitched, my legs started to close.

But Josh wasn't having any of that. He wrapped his fingers around my thighs, forcing my legs back open as he drove into me at a punishing pace.

At this point, Josh was completely in control. Max lay flat beneath me, his dick so deep in my ass there was no way he could move his hips.

Instead, he let the movements of Josh's body feed both of our pleasure. Josh fucked me hard and fast, making my body rock beneath him. That in turn helped massage Max's dick, even as he stayed firmly in place inside my ass.

Perhaps sensing that I was nearing my limit, Max wound his arm around my torso and reached down to finger my clit. That was all I needed to fall hard and fast over the edge. Everything down below grew impossibly snug as my vision suddenly dimmed. I could feel both men tightening their holds, digging their fingers into my flesh as they joined me in a state of blind, orgasmic bliss.

Josh's come poured into the condom, warming me from the inside. His strokes grew shorter and harder, milking the moment until every last drop pumped from his body.

Then a rough growl rang in my ear from behind. Max had reached his peak, too, his body jerking beneath me, his dick throbbing in my asshole and pushing me into those quick little spasms that sometimes pulse through your pussy after a really intense orgasm.

After we all regained our ability to breathe and see, Josh gently lifted me off of Max's body and lay me back on the bed. The three of us shared a long, hot group kiss.

I never did make it back to my hotel room that night. Or the following evening, for that matter.

—L.J., Buffalo, New York

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